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XII.—COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE OF THE AMERICAN
REVOLUTION.

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COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

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MASSACHUSETTS DISCOVERS A METHOD OF COLONIAL SELF- GOVERNMENT.

Jared Sparks, in his *Life of Gouverneur Morris*, has comprehensively summarized the conditions through which the committee systems of the American Revolution sprang into efficiency:

And here it must be kept in mind that wherever the power of Great Britain was thrown off or disavowed, all political control passed by its natural course into the hands of the people. No man or body of men had authority to command any other body of men or individual; equality of rights produced an equality of condition, and the structure of government could only be raised on the strength of powers delegated anew to certain persons for this special purpose by the willing voice of the people, whom circumstances had made the sole arbiters of their own political destiny. Hence the primary movement was to bring the people to understand their interests and act in concert, and the first means used to attain this end was the establishment of committees of correspondence in different parts of the country. These committees were chosen in towns, counties, parishes, districts, or smaller neighborhoods. They were intrusted with certain powers, which enabled them to correspond with each other and to represent in some sort the political views and objects of their constituents. So necessary was this system in itself, and so well adapted to promote the general welfare, that it was acceded to everywhere, and in a short time committees were so universally appointed throughout the colonies that the friends of liberty had speedy and direct channels opened with each other in every part of the continent. This increased their mutual intelligence, gave them confidence and encouragement, harmonized their sentiments, and sowed the seeds of union.^a

The conjuncture of political exigency and colonial environment produced organization of a peculiar type. Indeed, so

^aSparks, *Gouverneur Morris*, I, 30, ff.

controlling was the geographical situation alone that this type necessarily reappeared in every plan for any kind of union. Here were local groups, widely separated. Unity of purpose might be affirmed among them, but it could not be carried to fruition without correspondence and cooperative effort by sympathetic nuclei in the individual colonies. The moment this becomes apparent examples of corresponding committees abound. Peters's early scheme for a confederation of the British colonies in 1754 was based upon this principle.^a Among the religiously inclined it appeared in a desire of communion between the churches.^b Merchants saw in this method a weapon for securing release from certain restrictive laws of trade.^c All protracted relations between the colonies and their colonial agents in England were based upon correspondence.^d Legislatures were wont to communicate their acts to sister assemblies.^e Secret societies found it desirable and convenient to disseminate their sentiments by correspondence.^f To cite such instances in a society whose individual members base a considerable portion of their daily activities in the employment of the same principle in the conduct of their various interests, political, religious, mercantile, and social, seems trivial. These earlier illustrations would not be worth recall-

^a Peters outlined the system that was applied in the choice of Assembly Committees of Correspondence twenty years later. "That the Legislature of Each Colony appoint a Committee of Union, whose business it shall be to correspond with all the other Committees,—to appoint the times & Places of Meeting in each Division, and to propose to their Respective Governments the Heads of such matters as shall be judg'd necessary to be immediately done, &c., as there may be more branches of Business assigned them.

That Delegates of the Committees of each Division shall have one annual Stated time of Meeting, and others occasionally, as in their Correspondencies they shall find it necessary. The place to be previously agreed upon by them." Am. Hist. Leaflets, No. 14, p. 6. In the later period there was an extension and distribution of functions, to suit the changed conditions, especially local needs.

^b Suggestions of Dr. Mayhew to James Otis, June 8, 1766. Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, p. 44.

^c Merchants in Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island in protest against the sugar act, and other restrictive trade measures. Frothingham calls attention to the suggestion of the Boston Evening Post, of November 21 and 28, 1763. *Rise of the Republic*, 162-163.

^d The committee chosen in 1770 to correspond with Franklin, agent to England, was also to communicate with the speakers of the several assemblies. Henry E. McCulloh, provincial agent of North Carolina, wrote from London, June 10, 1771, to the "Committee of Correspondence" in North Carolina (Col. Rec., N. C., IX, pp. 10-12).

^e There was an official appointment of a committee of correspondence—on the motion of S. Adams, says Wells—by the general court of Massachusetts, June 13, 1764, to act in the recess of the court, cooperate with the other governments to obtain a repeal of the sugar act, prevent a stamp act, etc. The Massachusetts Circular Letter of 1768 is, of course, a development of the same idea.

^f The Sons of Liberty put the plan in operation, even announcing their committees of correspondence in the newspapers (see action of Providence in Boston Gazette, August 12, 1765).

*Prove you live
within the geography of
the committee*

ing were it not that partisan historians have lost sight of the principle in their zeal to ascribe the origin of the particular committee under discussion to the inventive political genius of their particular demigod. It is obviously a principle and not a prototype that we have to deal with.^a The principle is very simple, and very fundamental. It was correspondence, with cooperation at the terminal points, that brought about the Revolution. As a starting point for the study we may take November 2, 1772, and say that then, for all practical purposes, the committee of correspondence began its life as a local institution of the Revolution, and that Samuel Adams was its promoter. Its importance as a piece of revolutionary machinery can hardly be overestimated. It was not merely a channel through which public opinion might flow; it created public opinion and played upon it to fashion events. It was a mother of committees, and these committees, local and intercolonial, worked up the war. It initiated measures, and its activities comprehended legislative, executive, and judicial functions. It was the germ of a government.

In its inception, this government in embryo which Samuel Adams set going was purely a local affair. It was, broadly speaking, Adams's attempt to organize, in such a way that it could be utilized, that spirit of suspicion, discontent, and rebellion which he had long been fomenting in Massachusetts. That the organization should overleap the limits of the colony and his management may not have been a part of his original purpose. It does not appear, at any rate, that he foresaw the degree of success awaiting his scheme or ardently desired its development along the lines it followed. The movement, once

^a Richard Henry Lee in 1768 made a suggestion for forming private corresponding societies. A letter from Lee to Dickinson, July 25, 1768, proposes that select committees be appointed by all the colonies. Lee's *Memoirs of the Life of R. H. Lee*, I, 64.

A letter from Stephen Hopkins and others to Franklin, October 8, 1764, shows the same suggestion coming from another source. "SIR: We have been appointed a committee by the general Assembly of the colony of R. I., to correspond, confer and consult with any committee or committees that are or shall be appointed by any of the British colonies on the continent, and, in concert with them, to prepare and form such representations of the condition of the colonies, the rights of the inhabitants, and the interests of Great Britain as connected with them, as may be most likely to be effectual to remove or alleviate the burdens which the colonies at present labor under. * * * If all the colonies were disposed to enter with spirit into the defense of their liberties; if some method could be hit upon for collecting the sentiments of each colony, and for uniting and forming the substance of them all into one common defense of the whole; and this sent to England, and the several agents there directed to join together and in pushing and pursuing it there, in the properest and most effectual manner, it might be the most probable method to produce the end aimed at."—[Sparks edition of Franklin's Works, VII, 264, 265.]

begun, assumed large proportions and passed out of his control. So long as it was confined to any one colony the ruling spirit in that colony might dominate it; just so soon as it became intercolonial it broke the bonds of local control. The system was too large for one man to "boss."

In his own colony Adams was untiring and invaluable in setting the system in operation. His friends doubted the expediency of his plan and the measure had lukewarm support,^a but the men who feared or doubted were overborne and those who apprehended failure were silenced by the success with which Adams kept things moving. The Boston committee of correspondence has been likened to a political party manager. It provided for regular meetings, consulted with other similar bodies in the vicinity, stimulated the spread of committees in surrounding towns, kept up a correspondence with them, prepared political matter for the press, circulated it in newspapers and broadsides, matured political measures, created and guided public sentiment—in short, heated the popular temper to the boiling point of revolution and then drew from it the authority to act.

Plymouth followed Boston's lead. The popular party began to stir. The Boston committee met and organized. Its widely distributed report produced a great sensation. It began to assume the powers of a legislative and executive council. The tea importation opportunely gave the committees a subject for correspondence, and rapidly impelled the other principal towns to follow the example and appoint committees of correspondence with broad powers. By January of 1773 Hutchinson reported that 80 or more towns in Massachusetts had committees.^b Here was the nucleus for a local federation.

If at this point one should inquire what this body had been created out of, what necessity prepared the way for its existence, and what work it had to perform, it must be confessed that the committee of correspondence had no legitimacy as a governing body, no institutional authority; that its existence was based on popular impulse, skillfully manipulated, and

^a The selectmen, Hancock among them, rejected the first petition for a town meeting. The one finally called took no definite action. After two adjournments about 300 attended the meeting called for November 2, and Adams then put his motion. It was carried, after some debate, although it proved difficult afterwards to find members willing to serve on the committee.

^b Bancroft (1854), VI, 445. Hutchinson, Hist. of Mass. Bay, III, 369.

Not supported
First

Committees had
ZERO traditional
authority *

that its permanence could only be insured by discarding custom, precedent, authority—the usual bulwarks of good statecraft. The earlier committees of 1764, 1768, and 1770 arose out of specific needs, and their instructions had been clear and definite; but this new creation bore no relation to them, and the language of Adams's famous motion, from which the new body must draw instructions as well as authority to act at all, is vague and florid. The contingencies which the committee of correspondence actually faced grew out of future developments and conditions which the committee itself was largely instrumental in creating. As a substitute for the existing form of government it would appear ludicrously insufficient. It was not capable, as a revolutionary institution, of meeting the requirements of a general revolutionary movement. It was the germ of a government, but one that would have been purely local.

VIRGINIA SUPPLIES A CONNECTING LINK.

The only direct injunction laid upon the Boston committee of correspondence by Adams's motion involved a function that this committee was not well adapted to perform, namely: "To state the rights of the colonists, and of this province in particular, as men and Christians, and as subjects; and to communicate to the world as the sense of this town, with the infringements and violations thereof that have been or from time to time may be made." This body would have served as well as any other, perhaps, to state the rights of men and Christians, but the rights of a province and its members as subjects of a government could not be very consistently stated by an extra-legal body composed of men who were acting as anything but subjects, with no vestige of provincial or governmental authority, a body which existed in direct contradiction of the principles and well understood desires of the established government. Yet this function was a most important one, for in it lay the key to concerted action and to union.

This function, therefore, developed a new necessity in the committee organism, namely, somebody to speak officially for the colony as a unit; and the organism promptly evolved a new arm to assume this function in the choice of committees

of correspondence by the various assemblies.^a While one would naturally look to this body for correspondence on matters of great moment, since it was in the recess of the legislature the official mouthpiece of the colony, the governor being the mouthpiece of the Crown, it was, for reasons that will appear, never a body that originated action. As a matter of fact intercolonial correspondence was conducted by committees of all grades, town, assembly, and county, the latter a new organ of still later development—a freedom of use that added greatly to efficiency of action.

The contention that has appeared over the originator of local committees of correspondence marks also notices of the assembly committees, while the fact that the difference between the two has failed to elicit a distinction has added further to the confusion.^b In this case as in the other the essential thing is not that some colony suggested the idea before some other, but that in all the colonies circumstances had at length combined to make the idea fruitful. However, to one who examines the instructions given to the assembly committees in the course of their appointment there can be no doubt as to the effective promoter of this part of the system.^c

When the Virginia house of burgesses met on March 12, 1773, and appointed their committee, no other assembly had chosen one. This committee was "to obtain the most early and authentic intelligence of all such acts and resolutions of the British Parliament or proceedings of administration as may relate to or affect the British colonies in America; and to keep up and maintain a correspondence and communication with our sister colonies respecting those important considerations; and the result of such their proceedings from time to time to lay before this house."^d

No similar committee was appointed throughout the col-

^a Governor Hutchinson saw at once the tremendous scope of the principle. "It was a most glaring attempt to alter the constitution of the colonies, by assuming to one branch of the legislature the powers of the whole; by continuing, by delegation, powers of government, after the authority from which delegation was derived had expired; and by uniting in one body a number of bodies, which, by their constitutions, were intended to be kept separate and unconnected. It was an act which ought to have been considered as an avowal of independency, because it could be justified only upon the principle of independency." Hist. Mass. Bay, III, 397.

^b Prof. J. M. Garnett makes a similar classification in Va. Hist. Coll., n. s. XI, 4-5. Frothingham speaks of "legislative committees," but the distinction does not amount to a classification.

^c The texts of the resolutions and instructions of the several assemblies may be conveniently compared in the Rhode Island Colonial Records, VII.

^d Va. Cal. State Papers, VIII, 1.

*Officer Gov. =
Mouthpiece of Gov/consortium*

onies for two months. Then, on May 15, 1773, their appointment began in the New England group. On that day the speaker of the house in Rhode Island wrote to the speaker of the house of burgesses notifying him of Rhode Island's appointing a committee of correspondence and inquiry.^a The instructions to this committee were copied from the Virginia resolutions. Six days later Connecticut took similar action in the house of representatives.^b In New Hampshire this body acted on the 27th, passing resolutions relative to those of Virginia and Rhode Island, and appointing a standing committee of correspondence and inquiry.^c It was the 28th of May before Massachusetts acted on the Virginia letter and appointed her committee.^d She was thus the last of the New England group and the fifth in sequence to take this action, and her instructions, like all the rest, reecho the words of the Virginia resolutions.

Thus, in the month of May, 1773, the New England colonies, acting on the incentive of the Virginia letter, and copying the words of the Virginia resolution, created a second type of corresponding committees. On June 14 Samuel Cooper wrote to Franklin: "Virginia has led the way by proposing a communication and correspondence between all the assemblies through the continent; Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire have already chosen committees, so that all New England is now united with Virginia in this salutary plan, and the accession of most, if not all, of the other colonies is not doubted."^e

In the southern colonies the progress of the movement was slower, more than a month intervening before South Carolina, the first to act, appointed her committee, on July 8.^f Georgia took like action on September 10,^g Maryland on October 15,^h Delaware on October 23,ⁱ and North Carolina on the 18th of December.^j

^a R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 227-228.

^b Va. Cal. State Papers, VIII, 22-23.

^c R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 228-229.

^d Ibid., 229-230.

^e Franklin's Works, VIII, 49-50.

^f Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 24-27. This committee was chosen from a "standing committee of correspondence," already existing in South Carolina.

^g R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 233-234.

^h Ibid., 234-235.

ⁱ Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 31.

^j R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 238.

The middle colonies, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, were even more dilatory in acting. John Cruger, writing for the New York assembly on April 14, 1773, acknowledged the receipt of the Virginia communications and stated that they would be laid before the assembly when it convened.^a In a later letter (May 29) he says that this may not be before the beginning of next year.^b It was January 20 before the New York assembly appointed its committee of correspondence.^c The New Jersey assembly acted similarly on the 8th of February.^d The letter which Virginia sent to Pennsylvania did not elicit even a prompt reply. The speaker of the house, J. Galloway, wrote on September 25, 1773, that although the house deemed it important to cooperate with the other colonies, it preferred to leave the matter over to the next assembly.^e The assembly dissolved in a few days, and no action was taken.

We find, therefore, in the early part of the year 1774 twelve committees of correspondence existing, appointed by the legislative bodies of their respective colonies. The idea was apparently embodied in a more perfect organization than ever before. But the new type did not possess activity to match its seeming importance. These assembly committees were inactive from the first.^f The cause of this inactivity is not far to seek. In the first place, there was little or nothing for them to do. Since last June, wrote the Connecticut committee in November, 1773, nothing had happened worth transmitting.^g On May 6, 1774, there was a meeting of the Virginia committee which listened to the report of their select committee and heard the letters read which had been received

^a Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 15.

^b R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 230.

^c Ibid., 287.

^d Ibid., 288.

^e Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 28.

^f Frothingham (*Rise of the Republic*, 311) says that the leaders of the Revolution took advantage of the tea act, which made taxation a living issue, to extend the organization of committees of correspondence, and he cites as evidence these assembly committees appointed between September 10, 1773, and February 8, 1774; that is, Georgia, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, New York, and New Jersey. It may be questioned if the opposition to the tea act was as lively in these colonies as in the northern. The spread of the committees in this period covers only one-half the total number appointed, and their appointment was much less rapid after the passage of the tea act than before. Frothingham himself will serve as authority that in their correspondence no reference was made to the tea question, save by Massachusetts and Connecticut. (*Ibid.*, 312.) The initiative was taken by Virginia, and Frothingham tells us that at the time "nothing especially exciting had occurred in that colony." (*Ibid.*, 279.)

^g Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 33.

from different colonies.^a The long intervals between their meetings denotes the lack of important business. On August 29, 1774, Warren, writing for the donation committee at Boston, to Norwich, Conn., said that there was nothing of importance happening that could not be found in the public papers.^b

Secondly, these committees were chosen from members of the assembly, all of whom were desirous of going home when the assembly adjourned. Therefore, under ordinary conditions, the dissolution of the assembly dissolved the committee. For example, Mr. Cruger, speaker of the house in New York, wrote to Virginia, June 9, 1774, that the committee had dispersed, but that he had sent letters to convene them at the earliest opportunity, a somewhat indefinite date.^c Again, on the 27th of the same month, he wrote to the speaker of the house in Rhode Island that the latter's letter was received on the day after the committee had broken up and the members had returned to the country.^d The same thing occurred in Virginia. On the 30th of May, 1774, 25 of the late representatives, "legally assembled," agreed that letters be written to all the colonies, acknowledging the receipts from Boston and informing them that before they came the assembly had dissolved and most of the members returned to their counties.^e

In the third place, the assembly committees were extremely cautious about acting on their own authority, since they were chosen from a body to which they would be held responsible. This is shown by their being given specific directions to act in certain cases and by their hesitancy to act without such in others. For example, the Massachusetts committee, in communicating to the other colonies the port act, was acting under specific directions from the house,^f while, on the other hand, the New York committee, at a time when the house was dissolved, in June, 1774, wrote to Virginia that although they considered a congress the proper thing, they, as merely committee of correspondence, had no power to appoint deputies to a congress.^g A few days earlier the North Carolina

^a *Ibid.*, 9.

^b *Mass. Hist. Coll.*, 4th series, IV, 46.

^c *Va. Cal. St. Pap.*, VIII, 59-60.

^d *R. I. Col. Rec.*, VII, 296.

^e *Va. Cal. St. Pap.*, VIII, 52-53. Note also *Ibid.*, 65, "since writing the foregoing, the gentlemen of our committee returned to their home."

^f *R. I. Col. Rec.*, VII, 292.

^g *Va. Cal. St. Pap.*, VIII, 66. An early disclaimer of what was later assumed as a proper function. The local New York committee had no hesitancy in undertaking to manage an election held for this specific purpose. *Supra*, p. 263.

committee had expressed itself similarly on the same subject.^a The Virginia committee also hesitated to speak for the province on decisive measures.^b

Under such circumstances, the assembly committee of correspondence was nothing else than a standing committee of the legislative body in each colony. The speaker of the house generally acted as its secretary. It acted on advice or direction of the house, to which it was held responsible, and to which it reported its action. These committees were created by constitutional bodies, and their functions can not be considered extra-legal. In fact, they were far too regular to be efficient as pieces of revolutionary machinery. However, the choice of such committees was not entirely without result. The popular assembly in each colony received preliminary testing. Constitutional questions were raised and discussed, and arguments disseminated, a thing of some importance when the colonies were feeling their way toward a common basis of opposition to the crown which should have at least a semblance of rationality and consistency.^c While disclaimers of any intent to sever the connection between America and Great Britain had been made, even by that arch-revolutionist, Samuel Adams himself, the very declaration was so skillfully framed as to have precisely the opposite influence.^d More important still had been the demonstration that a body could be created which might continue to act in successful opposition to the crown when the royal governors dissolved or prorogued the assemblies. In North Carolina and in New Hampshire this efficiency of the principle was demonstrated in the spring and summer months of 1774, although no important matter of business was under way.^e Hutchinson, always keen to discover the principle involved in any action and quick to perceive the ultimate possibilities

^a Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 64.

^b Ibid., II.

^c For example, the inquiry into the proceedings of the general court of Virginia on the requisitions made for the writs of assistance, and the discussion thereof. (Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 6-9.)

^d See, for instance, the inflammatory letter of October 21, 1773, in which these words occur: "Esto perpetua is our most ardent wish." (Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 130.)

^e The governor dissolved the assembly in North Carolina before the news of the port act reached it. The committee called the representatives together because the governor would not. In New Hampshire the committee summoned the representatives to meet immediately after Governor Wentworth had dissolved the assembly, in May, 1774. (R. I. Col. Rec. VII, 301; N. H. Prov. Pap., VII, 366, 379 ff.)

of its development, had written to Lord Dartmouth in 1773, July 10, on this very point:

The assemblies of Virginia, this province, Rhode Island, and Connecticut have appointed their respective committees of correspondence, who act in the recess of the courts; and the like committees are expected from the other assemblies when they shall be convened. This in some measure defeats and counteracts the powers reserved to the governors, in what are called the loyal governments, of proroguing or dissolving the assembly at pleasure.

NEW JERSEY PERFECTS A TYPE OF COMPLETE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT.

The committee of correspondence was essentially a local institution, and local conditions created its characteristic features in the different colonial communities. We may leave the assembly committees, therefore, at this point, as highly perfected but not very highly effective arms of the system, and turn to the development of certain features in other quarters that were to prove not only highly perfected but highly efficient as well. This leads us to the evolution of the county committee of correspondence, the best type of which is to be seen in New Jersey.

This part of the system was evolved to meet particular needs, just as the first town committee of correspondence had been. The holding of a congress had already been projected, and to take the initiative in actually convening it what better agent could have been fallen upon than that which had suggested it, which was wholly irresponsible to royal government, but immediately amenable to public opinion and responsive to local needs? Some one writing from Philadelphia on the 22d of June, 1774, outlined a plan which was essentially that on which the New Jersey committees of correspondence were constructed. This writer thought that the best method of choosing deputies for a congress would be through their nomination by representatives in the assembly. Another plan, the next best, would be for freemen qualified to vote for members of assembly to choose delegates to a provincial convention in each colony, this convention to nominate the colony's deputies to a congress. An additional advantage of this plan would be that—

The representatives for each county will naturally form a standing committee for that county to correspond with the standing provincial commit-

Choosing Reps

caculus/convention

Operations

tee appointed by the provincial convention to act in their behalfs, as the convention can not be kept continually assembled. The business of the provincial committee, then, will be to correspond with the other colonies and with the county committees. The county committees may request every small district within the county, whether called township, hundred, etc., to choose one person to represent that township, hundred, etc., and may convey intelligence to each of these persons by letter or by stated meetings. Thus a most regular plan might be solidly established throughout this continent for communicating needful information to the individuals of the smallest districts in every county (a point absolutely necessary), and of receiving their sentiment; and both these offices would be performed by persons the most acceptable to them. Unless some such plan as this is framed it requires not the spirit of prophecy to foresee that the affairs of this continent will inevitably be confusedly conducted to an unfortunate issue.^a

The letter reveals political sagacity.

We are now entering upon a contest that may be continued for a long time, and we can not be too early in giving all regularity and stability to our proceedings. The whole people are oppressed; therefore they must act. Nothing should be taken for granted in a cause of such magnitude. It is not to be presumed that the body of the people in any colony will give their full and free assent to a single measure of their representatives assembled as private men. Met in legislation, they form a constitutional body. Ceasing to be that, their authority reverts to the people. In emergencies demanding public exertions, a supposed or implied assent of the people is not an assent to be regarded or depended upon. They must be represented actually, not "virtually." Can not an appeal be made to the people? Their sentiments taken, be from themselves, and not guessed at? If they have not wisdom and virtue enough to become agents in promoting their own temporal salvation it is in vain for others to attempt it.

The committee of correspondence was such an appeal to the people; it actually represented them; it made them agents in their own salvation; it gave stability to their proceedings.

The plan outlined in the Philadelphia letter had been already acted upon in New Jersey. The freeholders of Essex County met June 11, 1774, and appointed a committee of correspondence, whose particular duty was to meet with other county committees "in Order to nominate and appoint deputies to represent this Province in General congress."^b During the summer months the other counties of New Jersey took similar action.^c The convention thus anticipated met at New Brunswick, July 21, and nominated delegates to the continental congress which was to meet at Philadelphia in the following

^aForce, American Archives, 4th ser., I, 441-442.

^bNew Jersey Archives, first series, X, 467.

^cMinutes of the Provincial Congress and Council of Safety, New Jersey, 9 ff.

September. The New Jersey delegates promptly began to correspond.^a

The system at this point reached a well-nigh perfect adjustment. The elasticity of its operation in New Jersey makes that colony a model for its exposition. The inhabitants of each township elected a township committee of correspondence for the special purpose of corresponding with other township committees within the county. It could, however, extend its correspondence when necessary. The county committee was formed by the township committees from members chosen of their own number. This county committee would then correspond with the other county committees in the province, and when deemed necessary could call a county meeting or convention. It reacted through the township committees on the individual inhabitants. The county committees chose in turn certain of their own number to form a provincial committee of correspondence. The especial function of this body was to correspond with the other colonies and call a provincial congress for New Jersey when necessary. It reacted on its own colony through the medium of the county and township committees. The superiority of the provincial committee of correspondence over the assembly committees is obvious. It was always in session as a standing committee, and by referendum could at any time test the wishes of the people, since the town and county branches of the organization kept constantly in touch with them. The provincial congress on August 12, 1775, defined the qualifications of electors and the powers and functions of the different grades of committees. Thus perfected, the system was a rapidly working and highly efficient piece of administrative machinery. Connected with the popular cause through representation in Congress,^b the action of the system was equally facile toward the central government at one end of the chain of committees and toward the individual at the other, the county committees being responsible for the execution of the resolutions and orders of the continental and provincial congresses.

With this conspectus of the framework of the system we may turn to the storm centers where local committees were brewing trouble for Great Britain, for in spite of their

^aSee Va. Col. St. Pap., VIII, 72.

^bMinutes of Prov. Cong. and Council of Safety, 187; the same in Force, III, 42.

admirable adaptability as pieces of revolutionary machinery the committees rested after all for their success on the action of the mother country. If in good truth "esto perpetua" was their most ardent wish, this certainly must have been the case. But it was also equally the case whether "esto perpetua" was the motto or not.

MASSACHUSETTS SHOWS HOW TO MAKE A LOCAL GRIEVANCE A
GENERAL CAUSE.

No action
4/6 direct impact

A committee of correspondence was, to repeat, essentially a local agent. In this fact lay its revolutionary power, for revolution was a local affair in its inception. A committee of correspondence simply could not act unless something occurred which touched the interests of its own community. It was functionless if there was nothing to correspond about. To work up a successful revolution the correspondence must show the identity of various local interests or create a fictitious identity. The needed stimulus came in successive acts of Parliament, giving at first something to talk about and eventually something to do. The two phases of activity are well reflected in the correspondence.

Although the tea act had little influence in prompting the organization of assembly committees of correspondence, it did give decided impulse to the formation of local committees in all the communities that were immediately interested. Massachusetts furnishes obviously a case in point. The proposed consignment of tea had produced excitement, and the assembly and local committees acted at once and in harmony. There was a paramount issue. The assembly committees sent out a circular letter, October 21, reviewing the situation and urging the necessity of action by each colony to prevent the execution of the plan of the British ministry.^a This was the part of the larger committee.

On Sunday, the 28th of November, news spread about Boston that a tea ship lay in the harbor. The Boston committee of correspondence obtained from her owner a pledge that she should not be entered before Tuesday.^b Meetings were then held in consultation with committees of neighboring towns—Dorchester, Roxbury, Brookline, Cambridge—whose joint

^a Frothingham, *Rise of the Republic*, 303.

^b Frothingham, *Warren*, 254-255.

influence was to be used to prevent landing of the tea. The town put executive action into the hands of the committee. The committee kept up a military watch to prevent any landing of the tea, sent to the neighboring towns and to Rhode Island, New Hampshire, New York, and Philadelphia news of their proceedings, and urged on all the necessity of strenuous opposition.^a The owner of the ship was sent for repeatedly by the committee, who tried to force him to send the vessel back.^b On the 13th of December the committees of the five towns held a conference and the next day a handbill was posted calling a town meeting. On the evening of the 16th the tea was destroyed, and the next morning the fact was announced to neighboring towns by the Boston committee.^c

owner of ship
involved in tea
Party

The destruction of the tea at Boston brought the new organization into requisition for the first time in a way both successful and popular. It had worked through the press, the public meeting, and the mob. An opportunity had been created to communicate something of importance to the sister colonies, along with exhortations to stand by the rebellious member and make her cause their own.^d A second stimulus was not long wanting. The destruction of the tea brought its own penalty in the port act, and the port act through the skillful manipulation of the committees of correspondence was turned into a powerful force, working through popular sentiment for unity of action against the mother country.

On Tuesday, the 10th of May, news of the port bill came. The scheme of action was like that before. The assembly committee sent the act to the other colonies, requesting them to give it their immediate attention. The committees of eight adjoining towns now met the Boston committee at Faneuil Hall and determined to send letters to the several committees in other colonies where they existed, urging as a remedy a renewal of the nonimportation association, which had been used after the stamp act.^e

^a Ibid., 255, 261, 265, 266. See also Mass. Hist. Coll., 4th series, IV, 373, ff., especially John Scollay's letter to Arthur Lee.

^b Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc., 1873-1875, 169.

^c Ibid., 173.

^d The Boston Gazette, January 10, 1774, said: "The united spirit of the people of South Carolina, Philadelphia, New York, this province, etc., in opposing the subtle design of the British administration, to make the East India Company the instruments in establishing the revenue and thus enslaving the continent, forbodes a happy union of counsels among the several colonies by means of their committees of correspondence." (Cited by Frothingham, Rise of the Republic, 314, note.)

^e Boston Town Records, May 13, 1774, et. seq.

Nothing could better forecast the power that this new engine of revolution was to acquire than the success of its action on the Boston port act. It proposed the same remedy for a local grievance—the port act—that had been applied to a general grievance—the stamp act. The two were entirely different in purpose and intended operation, but the committee of correspondence seized the occasion to coerce opinion from sentiments of sympathy, and evoked therefrom a consensus of thinking that augured well for the cause of union. The port act letter was followed by an extension of local committees throughout the colonies. Southern journals began to abound with accounts of their meetings.^a The development of the revolution was rapid from this point. The consensus of opinion that obtained on the necessity of united action prompted that movement to secure it which led to a congress, while the multiplicity of local duties accruing with every onward step led to the splitting up of this mother committee with its general duties into a host of lesser committees, each having its own special function to perform. The creation of a congress marks an unequivocal step in the progress of the revolution, and the influence of the committees of correspondence in promoting it deserves attention at this point.

*New
Congress
created*

NEW YORK SHOWS THAT A SLIGHTLY REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNITY MAY SUGGEST A MOST REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT—THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS.

While a congress would have been a very logical development from the committee organization that we have seen in New Jersey, or from the meetings of local groups of committees of correspondence, dignified by the name of conventions, that began to appear in Massachusetts after the regulating act, the actual suggestion for that most revolutionary body, the Continental Congress, brings our attention to still another community, and one in which the nonrevolutionary element was strong.

The complexity of the situation in New York renders analy-

^a The Massachusetts Gazette of July 4, 1774, said: "The newspapers from all quarters, in every British-American colony, so far as we have yet received intelligence, are chiefly filled with accounts of meetings and resolutions of towns and counties, all to the same purpose, complaining of oppression, proposing a congress, a cessation of intercourse with Great Britain, and a contribution to the relief of the Boston poor." Cf. Scharf, Md., II, 143f. For correspondence regarding donations for the Boston poor, see further Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., 4th ser., IV, 1 ff.

sis of events difficult, to say nothing of analysis of motives. The most pregnant action proceeds apparently from the struggles of local factions, from the attempted settlement of local issues, or from personal considerations, rather than from any well-conceived design to lay the basis for permanent local or national institutions.

New York, like Massachusetts, at the time of the stamp act trouble had a committee of correspondence. When the act was repealed this committee's nominal existence ceased, but its members, perhaps not unnaturally from their previous service, took an active part in the choice of the new committee. We have seen that New York did not quickly respond to the example and suggestion of Virginia in choosing an assembly committee. An interesting commentary on the local situation is the fact that she was even more dilatory in choosing her local committee.

This committee was formed between the 16th and the 19th of May, 1774.^a In the choice of the committee two distinct influences appear—merchants and mechanics. The merchants, the leading element, called the first meeting, held on the 16th, which first nominated the committee. The mechanics did little but concur afterwards in the appointment. Dawson says that the committee thus formed represented the aristocratic, antirevolutionary party, who were nevertheless opposing England's colonial policy. Their attitude was perfectly rational. As merchants it was their interest to continue business, so they were antirevolutionary. But it was just as much their interest to continue it without restrictions, so they were opponents of the colonial policy. This attitude, however, brought them between two fires. On the one side was the mother country, on the other the revolutionary element in the city, the unfranchised workingmen and mechanics. To preserve their interests they had adopted exactly the same instrument that in the other colonies was a tool of revolution. To have any efficiency their committee must act with the others. It also happened that they had chosen a committee so large as to split readily into factions. The moment any such split occurred the unfranchised mass, strong enough to be deferred to in the appointment of the committee, would not unlikely hold the balance of power. Thus it might happen

^a Force, I, 294.

*hurrying 7 weeks
more likely to support
independence*

*merchants
want stability
BUT...
opposed King
Colonial policy*

that a committee at first loyalist in composition might be completely transformed by the forces acting upon it. Factions appeared early, and the mechanics began an organization on the model furnished by the merchants. Concessions were made by the latter to keep this revolutionary wing within the main body. Every movement made revealed the growing power of the more popular as well as more populous body. A split soon occurred within the committee itself, 10 or 11 of the more radical members resigning. The conservatives were forced to become more and more revolutionary in tone and make greater concessions if they were to retain their control.

How to
move pro
establishment
to be pro liberty

The measures resorted to amounted virtually to an extension of the franchise. This concession allowed democracy a peaceful victory, and changed New York into an orthodox member of the system, working like all the rest toward revolution.^a But the action, which was in its nature most revolutionary, had already begun. Suggestions for a congress had been whispered elsewhere, but at the moment of its practical inception it stands to the credit of New York's committee of correspondence. Royal governors could have thwarted any action on the plan of May 17, put forth by the town of Providence,^b by simply proroguing any assembly that undertook to choose delegates according to her proposition. Appointment by some body that was not amenable to royal authority was more essential than regularity, constitutionality, or uniformity of appointment throughout the colonies. This need was exactly supplied by the committees of correspondence.

New York's suggestion was made in her reply to the letter from Boston on the port act. The date of the reply was May 23. It announced the recent appointment of the New York committee, expressed appreciation of the critical situation, and suggested that a congress be held. The burden of the letter is this idea.^c Four days after New York's proposition had gone toward Boston the Virginia house of burgesses entered into an association and recommended the committee of correspondence to correspond with the other colonies on the same subject.^d This was at once done. Other colonies

^a Most of the facts in the case can be gleaned from Force, I, 294-330. Dawson, Westchester County in the Revolution, should also be consulted.

^b Force, I, 333.

^c Ibid., I, 297; Dawson, Westchester County, 17 ff.

^d Force, I, 351; Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 10.

sent expressions of similar purport, and the Boston committee, which had been at first inclined to ignore the suggestion and cling to its own special case, was under the necessity of trimming its sails a little closer to a clearly revolutionary breeze.

The importance of the step now entered upon can hardly be overestimated. The earlier intercolonial correspondence had consisted largely of expressions of good will, unity of sentiment, and firmness of purpose to resist oppression. All this was aimless until some body assumed the direction of it to the accomplishment of an end. The Continental Congress was the body hit upon. The idea was extensively promulgated in the correspondence of the numerous committees and secured widespread approval. The acceptance of the idea was retroactive on the committee system, as has been shown by the reference already made to the Philadelphia letter of June 22, and that further development of the committee system which we have noted in New Jersey; that is, the evolution of new organs to perform special functions relating to the central government, a development of no little interest, since it constructed a pretty adequate scheme of representative government.

Without following in detail the discussion and correspondence on the subject of a congress, we may see by a glance at the credentials of the first delegates the part played by the committees of correspondence in getting the Continental Congress started. It appears that in some cases the committees were directly vested with authority to make the appointments.^a This was the case in Connecticut. In New York City the delegates were chosen by "duly certified polls taken by proper persons in seven wards," the committee of correspondence arranging and managing the election. A meeting of the committees of the several districts in Westchester County, Albany (city and county), and Dutchess County confirmed the same. In New Jersey the election was conducted according to the plan already described, by committees of the several counties. The Maryland delegates were similarly appointed. It thus appears that committees of correspondence in several instances had a direct hand in selecting the men to attend the congress they had proposed.^b

^a Force, I, 893 ff.

^b As soon as Congress began to act it revealed further influences from the committees. Nearly every measure that it adopted can be found suggested in outline in some committee's letter. The "Association," with its nonintercourse and nonconsumption features, is a sufficient case in point (see Force, I, 347, 353, 384; Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 46).

REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES FORCE THE DISINTEGRATION OF
THE COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE.

It was supposed that the Congress would react in the various localities through the committees. For example, the twelfth article of the association runs thus: "That the Committee of Correspondence, in the respective Colonies, do frequently inspect the Entries of their Custom Houses, and inform each other, from time to time, of the true state thereof, and of every other material circumstance that may occur relative to this association."^a The burden of work thus put upon these committees was in itself enough to insure their disintegration. As soon as any of their suggestions had received the sanction of Congress they became the basis of renewed activity in every community. Thus the functions of the committees increased many fold, and the time of their disintegration was hastened by their increase of duties. But it was to them, already organized and in active operation, that the new Congress at first looked for the local superintendence needed to carry out its regulations. Out of this necessity arose both new functions of the old committees and a whole brood of lesser committees, or rather committees with more specialized duties, like the committees of safety, inspection, observation, etc.

For example, in Maryland the various counties held meetings, adopted the resolutions of Congress, appointed new committees of correspondence, and larger committees to enforce the association. The new needs were felt to be strong enough to call for the creation of special bodies.^b In New Jersey the division is illustrated in still a different way. The committees of correspondence of Essex County called the attention of the freeholders and voters to the association, and recommended that a separate committee be appointed for each of the three precincts into which the county was divided. For this purpose they called a meeting of each precinct on specified days, and recommended the number of men that should form the committee of each. They also advised that a new committee of correspondence be appointed to instruct the representatives to the next assembly to choose delegates to the second Continental Congress to be held in the following May. In case the assembly did not so appoint, the committees of

^a Force, I, 915.

^b Scharf, Maryland, II, 163. Force I, 1059-1061; 1140 pp.

Di. Hist
Subs. 927

correspondence of the several counties were to proceed as before to the appointment.^a Here we have the committee of correspondence proposing new outlines of government, but retaining the possibility of its own perpetuation. Its suggestions were followed to the letter.

A general meeting of the inhabitants of the township of Woodbridge, Middlesex County, N. J., adopted the association in January, 1775, and appointed a committee of observation. The old town committee of correspondence desired to be dismissed, and a new committee was appointed. The same provision as in Essex County was made for securing delegates to the coming Continental Congress in case the assembly failed to elect.^b It is evident from these cases that the committee of correspondence was not retaining its place as the sole or principal committee in the colonies. Its existence was no longer imperative. Concerted action was now insured by the agency of the Continental Congress. That part of the committee's function had been performed once for all by the creation of that body, and the committee itself forthwith either drops to a lesser position of local importance or becomes the instrument of occasional communication between the colonies and their representatives in Congress, or both. The one function, arising from a variety of local needs, was not of a sufficiently uniform character to preserve the type, while the other function was so infrequently exercised as to dispense with the necessity for a permanent body to perform it. The committee of correspondence, therefore, loses its former characteristics, its distinctive features disappear, and it falls into desuetude.

It may appear inconsistent to say that the decline and dissolution of the committees occurred simultaneously with an extension and increase of their duties, such as the Continental Congress is said to have caused, but such is the case. The increasing burdens themselves were an agent in hastening the dissolution. The citation of a few cases will illustrate both the nature of the increasing demands on the committees and their disintegration into different bodies which acted cooperatively to the same end.

Massachusetts was, of course, the scene of a special activity, since military operations were early begun there. Her committees assume or are delegated all sorts of duties. In

^a N. J. Min. Prov. Congress and Council of Safety, 34-35.

^b Ibid., 45-46.

Worcester County, September 21, 1774, it was voted that the committee of correspondence of any town threatened with invasion should notify by immediate post the committees of adjoining towns, so that all might gather with their arms for defense. It was earnestly recommended to the committees of correspondence of the seaport towns that committees be appointed to inspect the imports and publish in the Boston papers the names of the importers, that they might be shunned.^a Some of these requirements are similar to duties that have been previously mentioned. The system of relays outlined here was exactly the system by which news of the battle of Lexington was sent through the length of the land. The news of this event can be traced through the colonies from Watertown to North Carolina, going day and night, from town to town, the hours of arrival and departure indicating the haste with which the tidings were transmitted, township, county, and assembly committees, without distinction, assisting in the process.^b At a later period in the Revolution the matter of establishing post riders and beacon communications was taken in hand by the committee of safety.^c

Returning once more to Massachusetts, we may see the Boston committee taking an interest in the labor problem. On September 24, 1774, this committee mildly recommended the workmen of the town not to assist the British army in building barracks, lest umbrage be given to neighboring towns and colonies and their aid be withheld from Boston. New York was the sister colony in the committee's eye in giving this advice.^d The recommendation develops an amusing feature when we read a letter that New York had received a fortnight earlier from Boston, unequivocally stating that Gage could find none so base in that town as to help him and so was going to send to New York.^e On the 27th of September, the selectmen and the committee of correspondence of Boston sent for a Mr. Scott, and told him that he deserved immediate death for selling warlike stores to the enemy. A number of

^a Force, I, 795-797.

^b Ibid., II, 363ff.

^c N. J. Min. Prov. Cong. and Coun. Safety, 327. It should be noted that before this arrangements had been made for a continuation of the old post-office system, but wholly in the hands of the colonists. The excitement of the time made business for newspapers, and a newspaper man, William Goddard, of the Maryland Journal, was at the bottom of the post-office scheme. Force gives some account of his activity in the enterprise. Force, I, 500ff. (See also Frothingham, Warren, 297.)

^d Force I, 802 ff.

^e Ibid.

people immediately assembled and manifested a willingness to put the sentence into execution, but Mr. Scott was so fortunate as to make his escape.^a The joint committees of Boston and twelve adjoining towns resolved that any persons furnishing labor, lumber, joists, spars, pickets, straw, bricks, or any material to the enemy be deemed inveterate enemies of the people, and that committees of observation and prevention should be appointed in each town. The Boston committee sent letters to every town and district in the province, on the necessity of withholding all materials from the troops. This was still in September. In October the situation had become so alarming as to prompt the provincial congress to call upon the town officers and local committees in consultation on measures for the preservation of the town. In rapid succession committees were appointed for defense, for purchasing ordnance and stores, and on the 26th a committee of safety was created for inspection and observation, with power to call out the militia when necessary.^b Thus, functions which had formerly belonged to the committee of correspondence were passing into the hands of special committees whose creation had been forced on by the great pressure of political events.

Everywhere new committees were arising, and by much the same process. In North Carolina, for example, the provincial congress ordered "that the respective town and county committees elect by ballot, out of their own numbers, seven persons to act as a committee of secrecy, intelligence, and observation, who shall correspond with the provincial council, the committees of safety, and the other committees and neighboring colonies, and shall have power to take up and examine all suspected persons, and if necessary send them to the provincial council or the committee of safety of their respective districts."^c In Anne Arundel County, Md., the committee of correspondence became a branch or subcommittee of the committee of observation.^d In Rowan County, N. C., it was appointed by the committee of safety.^e In Maryland

^a Ibid., 806.

^b Ibid., 807, 808, 830 ff. The duties of committees differed in different localities. At Worcester the committee of correspondence had charge of the bayonets; at the port towns they had charge of shipping, exports, the landing of persons; care of the indigent, quarantine, etc., were among their duties elsewhere (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., 6th ser., VIII, 96, ff.; Force, III, 293-294).

^c Force, III, 308.

^d Scharf, Maryland, II, 170-171.

^e N. C. Col. Rec., IX, 1073-1074.

it also acted as treasurer of funds subscribed for the relief of Boston, and was authorized to stimulate benefactions in the several counties. It was authorized to expend money for arms and ammunition.^a In Frederick County it was turned into a committee of supplies and its term of office was limited. Its work resembles that of committees of other denominations more than it does the original work of correspondence. The committee in this county also was to receive subscriptions, and the names of any refusing to subscribe were to be reported. It also had the supervision of contracting for lead and handled the money collected for emergency expenditures.^b It is evident that under this process committees of correspondence would soon disappear in the multitude of new committees.^c

The other field open to the activity of these committees—the function of corresponding with the Continental Congress—did not perpetuate any of them into lasting importance. Congress had its own committees of correspondence, adapting the old principle to new uses, but the local and the assembly committees of correspondence had done their work once for all and their day was over. When, in 1783, the general court of Massachusetts felt the need of a committee of correspondence as a medium for the more perfect interchange of opinion between itself and the Massachusetts delegates in Congress, it was under the necessity of creating such a body anew. This committee was a lamentable failure, although its chairman was the very man to whose motion was due that famous creation of earlier days. Samuel Adams wrote to Gerry that the correspondence was to be very extensive. But the committee received a letter which it did not communicate to the legislature, an investigation was ordered, Adams narrowly escaped being censured, and the committee played no further part of importance.^d

That the committee of correspondence went to pieces does not signify that the system it inaugurated failed. On the contrary, the system had greater efficiency than it could have had if limited to the activity of a single body, for within certain limits every ramification was an additional member working for the common cause and specializing, as it were,

^aScharf, Maryland, II, 170, 171, 176.

^bIbid., 174-176.

^cFor this tendency see further: R. I. Col. Rec., VII, 284, 285; N. J. Min. Prov. Cong. and Counc. Safety, 162, 163, 185 ff.; Stephens, Hist. Georgia, II, 112; Force, I, 328.

^dWells, Life of S. Adams, III, 179-181.

particular functions. The fact that the same men were sometimes on different committees assisted in their cooperative and harmonious working, since it made each part more or less familiar with the mechanism of the whole and its own appropriate field for action.

THE COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE AS INDICATORS OF COLONIAL SENTIMENT.

In view of the unequivocally revolutionary character of the committee's work throughout this period, it is very instructive to read the expressions of purpose which had been framed but a few months earlier, when these committees were forming. In no more vivid way can the rapid effectiveness of the committee system in working up the Revolution be revealed. Reiterations of loyalty accompany the appointment of many of the first committees. The meeting of Essex County, N. J., which appointed its committee of correspondence June 11, 1774, resolved first "that we will ever cheerfully render all due obedience to the Crown of Great Britain, as well as full and faithful allegiance to His Most Gracious Majesty King George the Third; and do esteem a firm dependence on the mother country essential to our political security and happiness."^a Similar expressions came from other counties. Bergen County voted it "their greatest happiness to live under the Government of the illustrious House of Hanover." Hunterdon County, on the 8th of July, 1774, resolved:

We do most expressly declare, recognize and acknowledge his Majesty King George the Third to be lawful and rightful King of Great Britain, and all other his Dominions.

Morris County, on electing her committee of correspondence June 27, 1774, resolved:

That George the Third is lawful and rightful King of Great Britain and all other his Dominions and countries, and that as part of his Dominions it is our duty not only to render unto him true faith and obedience, but also with our lives and fortunes to support and maintain the just dependence of these his Colonies upon the Crown of Great Britain.—That it is our wish and desire, and we esteem it our greatest happiness and security to be governed by the laws of Great Britain.^b

There is a little residuum of this spirit in the initial correspondence of some of the committees. The responses of

^a N. J., Min. Prov. Cong. and Coun. Safety, 7.

^b Ibid., 10, 11, 13, et al.; N. C. Col. Rec., X, 11.

Alexandria and Philadelphia to the Boston committee in response to the port-act letter were calm and reasonable epistles. While sympathy was expressed for the town of Boston no rash measures were proposed, and a desire was manifested for a more general consensus of opinion.^a The function of the committees was to fan the flame of dissatisfaction in local centers so that when a deliberative body should meet it should be representative not of conservative but of revolutionary interests.

While the conservative party was large in some quarters it had nowhere the power of manifolding its influence, and it had nowhere an organization to offset that of the committees of correspondence in making use of the influence it did possess. The scope of this committee's work was not unforeseen or underestimated by the loyalists. Allusions have been made to Hutchinson's quick apprehension of the powers of such an organ. Daniel Leonard, an able Tory, wrote, with a mingling of metaphors:

"This is the foulest, subtlest, and most venomous serpent ever issued from the egg of sedition. I saw the small seed when it was implanted; it was a grain of mustard. I have watched the plant until it has become a great tree."^b

But the attempts of such men to stem the current were fruitless. They were keen enough to see the possibilities of the organization and the direction in which it tended, but were forced to act on the defensive. Their methods were negative, therefore, rather than positive. They would refuse to subscribe to the relief of Boston, for the purchase of arms, would refuse to do military service, to sign the association, to sell goods at fixed prices, might even voice their disapproval of the so-called patriotic acts, as in their motion to censure the Boston committee, or the protest of the Boston merchants to Gage, or the address of the Salem merchants and freeholders,^c but their active zeal could not outrun that of the royal governors, and they, Hutchinson at their head, realized the hopelessness of their task. Wentworth in New Hampshire, Morton in North Carolina, William Franklin in New Jersey, all had the same experience to report that Hutchinson met in Massachusetts in attempting to thwart the

^a Force, I, 485; Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 51-52, 69-70.

^b Hosmer's Hutchinson, 238.

^c Force, I, 424.

People knew about
of committees
about committees
were effective
because they were
in defense

new machine.^a Nobody could be held responsible. As Hutchinson said, there was no line that could be drawn between the supreme authority of Parliament and the total independence of the colonies.

From the first moment of its creation the committee of correspondence was an agent of revolution. Its offices in reconciling the interests of colonies and mother country were confined to statements of wish or intention, and the statements are a sufficient key to their own failure. The North Carolina committee of correspondence reasoned that "the best expedient to bring about a reconciliation with the mother country" will be for the colonies to join in a nonintercourse agreement^b. This would prove about as conciliatory as throwing tea into Boston harbor. No conciliatory advances were made to the royal governors, no instructions given to colonial agents which might pave the way to a smoothing over of difficulties. On the contrary, all propositions and measures had the reverse tendency. Before the expressions of regard for the reigning house which have been quoted had been recorded, a letter from Philadelphia to Boston ran in this wise:

By sea they will beat us; by land, they will not attempt us; we must try it out in a way of commerce. First, by suspending all trade with Great Britain we can lessen the revenue of the Crown near a £1,000,000 per annum. Second, by suspending all trade with the West Indies we can starve them and ruin their plantations; by withholding our provisions and lumber, in six months, which will stop the 4½ per cent to the Crown, ruin a great number of merchants in London, who are concerned in the West Indies, and deliver us from the slow poison we usually import from thence. Third, by withholding flaxseed from Ireland we can ruin the linen manufactory in twelve months. This will reduce about 300,000 people to a want of employ, which, with near an equal number of British manufacturers in Great Britain reduced to the same state, will soon muster tumults enough to fill their hands and hearts at home, for there is no satisfying starving people but by killing or feeding them. These are the means we are coolly deliberating; we have other things in contemplation, as stopping our ports entirely and laying up all shipping.^c

Conciliatory indeed! This was the spirit that permeated an organization unrivaled in its time and place. John Adams judged truly when he said that its conception embodied the whole Revolution.

^a Force, I, 745, 761, 762; N. H. Prov. Pap., VII, 369 ff.; Wells, S. Adams, II, 131; Frothingham, Rise of the Republic, 274; Hosmer, Hutchinson, 250 f.; N. J. Archives, 1st. ser., X, 464.

^b Va. Cal. St. Pap., VIII, 64-65.

^c Force, I, 347.