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Political Mobilization and the American Revolution: The Resistance Movement in Philadelphia, 1765 to 1776

R. A. Ryerson*

RECENT studies of the causes of the American Revolution have tended to emphasize its ideological origins to the comparative neglect both of the political processes by which principles, beliefs, and anxieties were translated into revolutionary action and of the considerable conflicts among Americans that were provoked or intensified by British imperial measures.¹ These conflicts were undoubtedly muted by ideological consensus in those areas where, as in New England and Virginia, the colonists, led by relatively united, native, established political elites, appear to have risen up virtually unanimously against the Empire and achieved independence with little internal social stress. But where America's rebellion deeply challenged the local established order and sharply divided the community, as was the case in most of the colonies, the key to understanding the success of the Revolution seems less likely to be found through an examination of ideology than through a close analysis of political process, specifically the process by which disaffected colonists were mobilized for resistance and revolutionary endeavor.

For the province of Pennsylvania, and particularly for the city of Philadelphia, where many if not most of the established political leaders linked their fortunes to the Empire and opposed or lagged far in the

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¹ Three recent, partial exceptions are Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution 1763-1776* (New York, 1968); Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970); and Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972).

rear of popular sentiment, four phases of the process of mobilization were crucially important: (1) The development of a commitment to resistance by a few dedicated leaders. (2) The creation of a new set of political institutions capable both of pressuring existing governmental organs to demand that Great Britain treat Pennsylvania in the manner that the province desired and, when the established order proved intractable, of acting as alternative executors of political authority until the polity could be redesigned on a permanent basis. (3) The shaping and maintenance of a virtually unanimous popular commitment to any plan that could secure Pennsylvania's autonomy, either within or outside the British Empire. (4) The rapid recruitment of new leaders, both to perform new political tasks and to represent a greater proportion of the potentially active population than had found a voice in the pre-Revolutionary polity.

The present inquiry will focus primarily upon this last activity—leadership recruitment—the very core of Revolutionary political mobilization in Philadelphia. The immediate objectives are to delineate the patterns of that recruitment, to identify the factors shaping those patterns, and to assess the impact of this activity upon Revolutionary politics in Pennsylvania. The larger goal is to demonstrate the central role of political mobilization in achieving the Revolution in one colony. Our questions and our methods for answering them, if fruitful, may serve as a foundation for a more precise understanding of the Revolution in every colony where the success of the resistance movement remained in serious doubt almost until the Declaration of Independence. On the broadest scale, to place mobilization at the center of America's Revolution is to relate that event intimately to the continuing and now global process of political modernization. In America, the most striking element of political modernization has always been the "extension of political consciousness to new social groups and the mobilization of these groups into politics."²

In the late 1760s and early 1770s, while Pennsylvanians grew increasingly distressed over the steady deterioration of relations with Britain,

² Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn., 1968), 266. For Huntington's general treatment of the American Revolution as a mobilizing and modernizing process see vii, 32-39, 93-139, 264-274. For another succinct definition of political mobilization see J. P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization: A Sociological Analysis of Methods and Concepts* (London, 1967), 32-33. The processes of mobilization are also of central importance in the recent, highly analytical work of such students of the general phenomena of revolutionary change as Chalmers Johnson and Ted Gurr.

their provincial government ignored the larger imperial questions of the day. Governor John Penn, cautious and divided in his loyalties, offered neither guidance nor opposition.³ Pennsylvania's assemblymen, still predominantly Quaker in faith or background, had long engaged the proprietor in political battles and, perhaps for that very reason, understood little or nothing of the frustrations and dangers of royal government. As the imperial crisis deepened they closed their eyes to parliamentary statutes and royal decrees that threatened their autonomy and went calmly on governing their no longer quiet province.⁴ By the early 1770s Pennsylvanians were rapidly losing confidence in their public officials. In June 1774 they began to turn to new men to lead them in resisting Great Britain.

The new radical leadership that emerged in Philadelphia and then throughout Pennsylvania arose out of a decade of mixed triumphs and frustrations.⁵ Established Quaker merchants and proprietary faction leaders alike, working through the city's first resistance committees, did

³ James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics 1746-1770: The Movement for Royal Government and Its Consequences* (Princeton, N. J., 1972); *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* (*Colonial Records of Pennsylvania* [Harrisburg, Pa., 1852-1853]), IX, X, hereafter cited as *Minutes of Provincial Council*; *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania*, in Samuel Hazard et al., eds., *Pennsylvania Archives*, 8th Ser. (Philadelphia, 1931-1935), VII, VIII, hereafter cited as *Votes and Proceedings*; Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 32-34, 46, 76-78, 79.

⁴ Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, esp. Chaps. 3-4; Benjamin H. Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway: A Political Partnership* (New Haven, Conn., 1972); Richard Bauman, *For the Reputation of Truth: Politics, Religion, and Conflict among the Pennsylvania Quakers, 1750-1800* (Baltimore, 1971), 27, 103-180; Hermann Wellenreuther, *Glaube und Politik in Pennsylvania 1681-1776: Die Wandlungen der Obrigkeitstheorie und des Peace Testimony der Quäker* (Cologne, 1972), esp. Chaps. 5-6, 10-12, and appendixes I-III, 432-437; David Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1961), 151-153; Theodore Thayer, "The Quaker Party in Pennsylvania, 1755-1765," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXI (1947), 211; Wayne L. Bockelman and Owen S. Ireland, "The Internal Revolution in Pennsylvania: An Ethnic-Religious Interpretation," *Pennsylvania History*, XLI (1974), 124-159, esp. 127-134; and my counting of Quakers in the Assembly in the summer of 1774, taken from "Leadership in Crisis," 39-41, 56, 651-653. Of 40 members, 11 were Friends in good standing by my count, while 9 had a strong Quaker background and may still have worshipped with the Friends.

⁵ I here employ the term "radical" strictly in relation to resistance strategy and tactics. Persons or groups herein labeled radical on any given date were those who were willing to go farthest in opposing British policy at that particular time. Thus an individual might be a "radical" in 1774 but only a "moderate" in 1776, if his attitudes and ideas had undergone no change in a period when public opinion was changing rapidly around him. I have tried to use the terms "moderate" and "conservative" in the same fashion.

strongly oppose the Stamp Act in 1765.⁶ The next several years, however, were lean ones for the resistance movement. Its few Assembly spokesmen lost their seats in 1766, and the city's leading Quaker, Anglican, and Presbyterian merchants, whom Charles Thomson and John Dickinson welded into a committee to direct an anti-Townshend Act boycott only with great difficulty in 1769, fell to arguing among themselves and soon abandoned nonimportation.⁷ It finally became evident to many Philadelphians that neither the city's merchants as a body, nor any established elite, nor any branch of the provincial government would go far to defend them.

Impelled by this widespread conviction, concerned Philadelphians organized around the city's first faction dedicated to resisting Britain's imperial policy. The new committee of twenty heading this faction, recruited in September 1770 from among citizens noted for both their economic prominence and their ideological zeal, did not enjoy wide enough support, especially with the merchants, to last long as a body.⁸ As a leadership core, however, it not only survived the "quiet period" (1770-1773) but mobilized the city's mechanics behind it.⁹ When the Tea Act of 1773 suddenly aroused the colonists, a radical leadership was at hand. The decision of the provincial government and of the older and wealthier merchants to accept the act allowed the radicals, again organized into a resistance committee, to incite the community to humiliate the local tea agents and send back the tea ship. Indeed, the dynamic orator Charles Thomson, "the Samuel Adams of Philadelphia," so thoroughly infused several thousand of his townsmen with anti-British zeal that they voted

⁶ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York, 1917); Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1953); Benjamin H. Newcomb, "Effects of the Stamp Act on Colonial Pennsylvania Politics," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIII (1966), 257-272; Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, Chap. 4; James H. Hutson, "An Investigation of the Inarticulate: Philadelphia's White Oaks," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 3-25; Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 87-92. For portrait data on the two committees of 1765 see Table I.

⁷ Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 105, 114, 115-120, 125-129, 191-194, 211, 215, 217-223, 226-233; Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, Chap. 4; Hutson, "Philadelphia's White Oaks," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 22-23; Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway*, Chaps. 4-8; *Votes and Proceedings*, VII, 6168-6169, 6181-6184, 6187-6192, 6193, 6244-6245, 6269-6282; Bauman, *For the Reputation of Truth*, 130-134; Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 93-110.

⁸ The names of these committeemen, 11 from the 1769 board who were loyal to the boycott and 9 fresh recruits, appear in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), Oct. 1, 1770.

⁹ Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, Chap. 4; Hutson, "Philadelphia's White Oaks," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971); Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway*, 212-213.

a full endorsement of the destruction of the tea at Boston.¹⁰

Thomson's triumph drew a sharp reaction from Philadelphia's more moderate Quaker and Anglican merchants, who moved quickly to regain control of city politics. Although with the arrival of news of the Boston Port Act in May 1774, the larger pattern of imperial affairs began to favor the resistance faction, Philadelphia's radicals had to accept an alliance with the moderate merchants in forming a committee to represent their city in response to Boston's call for aid and support. This committee urged Governor Penn to summon the Assembly into emergency session and endorsed the idea of a continental congress.¹¹

Yet almost immediately the radicals sensed a favorable shift in public opinion. As counties, cities, and towns to the north and south flocked to the banner of resistance, Thomson, who was Philadelphia's most innovative radical strategist, initiated a campaign to involve every religious congregation in the city in a vigorous protest against British policy.¹² The success of this appeal and Penn's refusal to call the Assembly gave the resistance faction its majority. In mid-June, by recruiting younger men of more modest fortune who followed many different trades and represented Presbyterians, Baptists, and Lutherans, as well as the dominant wealthy Quakers and Anglicans, radical resistance leaders doubled the city committee. This new board, directed by the town to insure Pennsylvania's participation in the Continental Congress, even if opposed by the

¹⁰ Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 240, 262, 268-281, 290-291; Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (New York, 1964), 97-103, 156-160; *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), Oct. 20, 1773; Thomas Wharton, Sr., to Thomas Walpole, May 2, 1774, Thomas Wharton, Sr., Letter-Book, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 111-127. John Adams first recorded this epithet for Thomson Aug. 30, 1774. L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. II: *Diary, 1771-1781* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 115.

¹¹ The best accounts of Pennsylvania politics in the spring and summer of 1774 appear in Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760-1776* (Philadelphia, 1901), 159-184; Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 341-356; and Labaree, *Boston Tea Party*, 230-232, 243-248. The account given here summarizes Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 131-231. The basic sources are the *Pa. Gaz.*, *Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), and *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia); the accounts of the radical leaders Joseph Reed and Charles Thomson, "The Papers of Charles Thomson," New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, XI (1878), 215-229, 269-286; and the rich manuscript holdings in the Pa. Hist. Soc., esp. the Gratz, R. R. Logan, Society, and Thomas Wharton, Sr., collections, and the Col. William Bradford, Henry Drinker, James & Drinker, and Charles Thomson papers. Cf. the 19 committeemen chosen on May 20, 1774 (Table II), with the 1769, 1770, and 1773 committeemen (Table I).

¹² *Pa. Packet*, May 30, 1774; *Pa. Jour.*, June 1, 1774; *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer* (New York City), June 2, 16, 1774; letters of May 29-June 9, 1774, Henry Drinker and James & Drinker Papers.

governor or the Assembly, quickly abandoned the cautious policy of the committee chosen in May.¹³

At once both Penn and the conservative Assembly agreed to the Congress in order to try to control the Pennsylvania delegation and check the resistance movement. But the legislature's appointment of moderate and conservative congressmen and its contemptuous rejection of the sweeping instructions framed in July by a convention of resistance committee delegates from throughout Pennsylvania proved ineffective.¹⁴ The resistance movement now had the confidence of the province. In the fall Joseph Galloway's hand-picked congressional delegation, sensing the popular mood, rejected its archconservative leader, abandoned the Quaker faction's accommodationist policy, and on October 20, 1774, endorsed the Continental Association, a declaration of open commercial warfare upon Great Britain.¹⁵

The decision of Congress to entrust the enforcement of the Association boycott to newly elected committees throughout the colonies put Philadelphia's resistance movement on a semi-official and quasi-governmental basis. This congressional mandate solved the question of the committees' institutional status, but their functions and goals continued to change, developing in three distinct stages.

¹³ *Minutes of Provincial Council*, X, 170-180; "Papers of Thomson," N.-Y. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, XI (1878), 278; *At a Meeting at the Philosophical Society's Hall on Friday, June 10th . . .* [Philadelphia, 1774]; Charles Thomson, Memorandum Book, 1754-1774, 159-162, Gratz Coll.; "list of Committee" [John Dickinson?], Dickinson material, R. R. Logan Coll.; "Papers relating to the shipment of tea" [misdated and mistitled], Pa. Hist. Soc.; official accounts of committee transactions, *Pa. Gaz.*, June 8, 15, 22, 1774; Wharton to Samuel Wharton, July 5, 1774, Wharton Letter-Book.

¹⁴ *Minutes of Provincial Council*, X, 180; "Papers of Thomson," N.-Y. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, XI (1878), 278-280; John Penn to the earl of Dartmouth, July 30, 1774, in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th Ser. (Washington, D. C., 1837-1846), I, 514; reports of committee and convention activity in the city and province, *Pa. Gaz.*, June 22, 29, July 6, 1774; *Pa. Packet*, June 18, July 4, 18, 1774; *Pa. Jour.*, July 20, 27, 1774; provincial convention's proceedings, *Pa. Arch.*, 2d Ser. (Harrisburg, Pa., 1874-1893), III, 545-622; Wharton to Walpole, Aug. 2, 1774, Wharton Letter-Book; "Notes and Papers on the Commencement of the American Revolution" [1869 transcription], Dr. William Smith Papers, Pa. Hist. Soc.; Joseph Reed to Charles Pettit, July 16, 1774, Reed Papers, N.-Y. Hist. Soc., New York City; letter from the Pennsylvania Assembly to the Massachusetts Assembly, June 28, 1774, printed in *Pa. Gaz.*, July 13, 1774; "A Freeman" [Joseph Galloway?], "To the Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania," *Rivington's N.-Y. Gaz.*, July 28, 1774; *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7097-7101. For two recent views of the politics of this period see Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 236-240, and Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway*, 243-259.

¹⁵ Worthington Chauncey Ford et al., eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I (Washington, D. C., 1904), 42-51, 75-81, 102n; *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7148, 7163.

In November 1774 Philadelphia's radical merchants broke with their moderate colleagues and joined the city's mechanics to elect a new, enlarged city committee dominated by young merchants, shopkeepers, and craftsmen of modest fortune.¹⁶ The triumphant radical-mechanic faction then sought to accelerate resistance by arming the still pacific province.¹⁷ This attempt failed utterly, and the committee had to exert its full strength to enforce the Association and to bar from the city press all criticism of the resistance strategy of Congress.¹⁸

Lexington and Concord ended open opposition to the resistance movement in Philadelphia. Even young Quakers rushed to arms, and the Assembly set to organizing and supplying the province's new militia forces. In May the city committeemen won election to over half of the command posts in Philadelphia's militia. Thereafter, militia leadership and committee leadership were nearly identical.¹⁹ In August the city, in electing a new and again expanded committee, chose leaders even less wealthy and more radical than their predecessors.²⁰ These zealots soon joined the even more ardent spokesmen of the militia privates in pressuring the Assembly to require that every adult male either bear arms or pay heavy additional taxes in lieu of military service.²¹ By November

¹⁶ *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23, 1774; *Pa. Packet*, Nov. 7, 1774; *Pennsylvania Ledger* (Philadelphia), Mar. 16, 1776; two election tickets, 960.F. 52, 53, Philadelphia Library Company, Philadelphia.

¹⁷ *Pa. Gaz.*, Dec. 28, 1774, Feb. 1, 1775; Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th Ser., I, 1066, 1180, 1211; William B. Reed, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, I (Philadelphia, 1847), 90, 94; Reed to [Pettit], Jan. 14, 1775, Reed Papers; Reed to Dennis DeBerdt, Feb. 13, 1775, Joseph Reed Letter-Book, 1772-1774 [sic], 129, N.-Y. Hist. Soc.; William Duane, ed., *Passages from the Remembrancer of Christopher Marshall* (Philadelphia, 1839), 15.

¹⁸ On the regulation of commerce see Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 498-500; James & Drinker to Pigou & Booth, Jan. 18, 1775, James & Drinker Letter-Book (Foreign), James & Drinker Papers; Henry Drinker to Benjamin Booth, Feb. 21, 1775, Drinker to Samuel Cornell, Apr. 22, 1775, Henry Drinker Letter-Book (Domestic), Drinker Papers; *Pa. Jour.*, Jan. 4, 1775; *Rivington's N.-Y. Gaz.*, Mar. 30, 1775; *Pa. Gaz.*, Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25, Feb. 1, 8, 1775; and Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 238-242. On the committee's suppression of dissent see *Rivington's N.-Y. Gaz.*, Dec. 1, 8, 1774, Mar. 30, 1775; *Pa. Ledger*, Feb. 11, 1775; *Pa. Gaz.*, Feb. 23, 1775; *Pa. Jour.*, Feb. 15, May 17, 1775; Duane, ed., *Passages from Marshall*, 24; Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th Ser., I, 1231-1232, 1233, 1243; and Ryerson, "Leadership in Crisis," 293-317.

¹⁹ *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7243-7249; Peters Papers, VIII [Richard Peters, Jr., militia papers], 44, 71, Pa. Hist. Soc. (Cf. the committee list, *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 16, 1774.)

²⁰ *Pa. Gaz.*, Aug. 9, 16, 23, 30, 1775; *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), Aug. 10, 1775; three election tickets, 962.F. 70, 72, 73, Philadelphia Lib. Co.

²¹ Peters Papers, VIII, 43, 54-65; *Pa. Packet*, Aug. 21, 1775; *Pa. Evening Post*, Sept. 14, 19, 28, 1775; *Pa. Gaz.*, Oct. 11, 18, Nov. 1, 15, 1775; Duane, ed., *Passages*

1775 Pennsylvania's pacifism was at an end.

Having failed either to persuade the Assembly or to compel it to act by threatening to convoke another provincial convention, Philadelphia's radical committee movement finally broke with it utterly and called for termination of its authority. But it was the Assembly, not the city committee, which brought on this confrontation. So desperately did the legislators oppose independence between November 1775 and April 1776 that the radicals, only recently accustomed to their uneasy alliance with their lawmakers, turned bitterly mistrustful of them.²² In May the current city committee, elected in February and completely controlled by the most radical young merchants and lawyers and the most zealous mechanics, reached two conclusions: first, that their liberties would never be secure short of independence, and, second, that Pennsylvania would never become independent under its present government.²³

Thus it was to escape permanently from what they felt to be British oppression that Philadelphia's radical leaders summoned committee delegates from throughout the province. In June these spokesmen repudiated the Assembly and arranged for the Constitutional Convention of 1776

from Marshall, 49-50, 53-54, 55-56; Christopher Marshall, Sr., to "S. H.," Sept. 30, Oct. 31, 1775, Christopher Marshall, Sr., Letter-Book, 146, 151, Pa. Hist. Soc.; Drinker to Booth, Oct. 3, 1775, Drinker Letter-Book (Domestic), 160, Drinker Papers; *Pa. Evening Post*, Oct. 3, 1775; *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7301-7302, 7306, 7311-7313, 7323-7324, 7326-7330, 7334-7343, 7351-7352, 7356-7363, 7365-7366, 7369-7384.

²² See *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 3750, 7353, 7455, 7513; *Pa. Jour.*, Nov. 22, 1755; *Pa. Ledger*, Nov. 25, 1775; *Pa. Jour.*, Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 1775, for the Assembly's opposition to independence. For early arguments favoring independence that appeared in the Philadelphia press see *Pa. Packet*, Nov. 14, 1774, Aug. 21, 1775; *Pa. Jour.*, Oct. 18, Dec. 27, 1775; Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Philadelphia, 1776); *Pa. Jour.*, Jan. 24, 1776; *Pa. Evening Post*, Feb. 3, 1776; Thomas Paine, "Epistle to Quakers," appended to the 3d ed. of *Common Sense* (Philadelphia, Feb. 12, 1776); *Pa. Jour.*, Feb. 14, 1776; *Pa. Evening Post*, Feb. 17, 1776. The only rebuttal to these arguments, before late February, was the Quakers' *Ancient Testimony and Principles of the People called Quakers renewed* . . . [Philadelphia, Jan. 20, 1776]. On the committee's alienation from the Assembly see Duane, ed., *Passages from Marshall*, 69; Reed to Pettit, Mar. 3, 1776, Reed Papers; *Pa. Packet*, Mar. 11, 1776; "The Apologist," *Pa. Evening Post*, Feb. 29; "The Censor," *ibid.*, Mar. 5, 1776; and *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7412, 7436. The independence debate continued in the "Cato" letters [Dr. William Smith], *Pa. Gaz.*, Mar. 13-Apr. 24, 1776; *Pa. Jour.*, Mar. 6, 13, 1776; the "Cassandra" letters [James Cannon], *Pa. Packet*, Mar. 25, Apr. 27, 1776; and the four "Forester" letters [Thomas Paine], *Pa. Jour.*, Apr. 3-May 8, 1776.

²³ *Pa. Gaz.*, Feb. 14, 21, 1776; Duane, ed., *Passages from Marshall*, 65, 71-75, 79-84; "The Forester," no. 4, *Pa. Jour.*, May 8, 1776; *The Alarm: or, An Address to the People of Pennsylvania* . . . [Philadelphia, 1776]; "Protest" of Philadelphia's mass meeting, May 20, 1776, and Philadelphia City Committee to the county committees, May 21, 1776, in Force, ed., *American Archives*, 4th Ser., VI, 519-521; William Bradford, Jr., A Memorandum Book and Register for May and June 1776, 23 (May 20), Bradford Papers.

which, by reforming both the Assembly and the franchise, finally revolutionized Pennsylvania's polity.²⁴ Through the committee movement the Revolution had at last triumphed in Pennsylvania.

How did the radicals achieve this victory? A quantitative analysis of their strategy of community mobilization through leadership recruitment, an assessment of the probable motivations behind that strategy, and a brief discussion of the central role of this recruitment in the coming of the Revolution in Pennsylvania may suggest some answers to this question.

In examining a group of about three hundred Philadelphians involved in resistance politics—many very prominent, yet easily as many very obscure—I have attempted to answer seven major questions. To what extent did the same men serve on one committee after another? How old were the committeemen at the time of their service? What was their economic status? How did they make their living? From what countries or colonies did they, or their immediate ancestors, come? To what religious faiths did they belong? Finally, do the answers to these questions show a change during the period under consideration, and if so, does that change indicate any purposeful shift in the pattern of leadership recruitment?

Persistency and Continuity. In the decade before independence certain names appear repeatedly on Philadelphia committee lists. How many of these committee veterans were there, and what does their presence indicate about the committee movement? The short-term persistency of committee service—the number of men on a given committee who sat on the succeeding committee—and the long-term continuity of that service—the number of men on a given board who had previous committee experience—together form a clear pattern of committee membership between 1765 and 1776. First, both the persistency and the continuity of committee service rose, although quite unevenly, despite the rapidly increasing size of city committees.²⁵ Neither the bitter struggles between conservatives,

²⁴ For the proceedings of the Provincial Conference see *Pa. Arch.*, 2d Ser., III, 635-665, and *Pa. Gaz.*, June 26, 1776. See also Marshall to "J. B.," June 30, 1776, Marshall Letter-Book, 191-192, and Duane, ed., *Passages from Marshall*, 87-88.

²⁵ The forward-looking persistency index is included here because of increasing committee size. Had only the backward-looking index of continuity been employed, a doubling of committee size would determine a relatively low percentage of carry-over, even if *all* members of the first committee served on the second. Thus the fact that 17 of the 19 committeemen of May 1774 continued to sit on the June committee gives a persistency rate of 89%, but a continuity rate of only 39.5%.

moderates, and radicals nor the mobilization of new leaders for ever larger boards prevented the resistance leadership in Philadelphia from becoming increasingly more experienced. Second, there were two sharp breaks in this growing continuity. Only 30 percent of the 1770 committee sat on the tea committee of 1773, and only 29 percent of the 1773 committeemen had ever served before. Again, only 42 percent of the June 1774 committeemen were elected to the November 1774 board, while only 35 percent of the latter body were committee veterans (Tables I and II). These breaks suggest that the tea committee and the November 1774 committee were somehow different from all other boards formed before 1775-1776, when a strong continuity was gradually reestablished. Quite apart from the slender literary evidence on committees, certain facts about the committeemen themselves confirm this view.²⁶

Age. It is harder to determine the age of Philadelphia's resistance leaders than any other simple fact about them. Yet three relationships

²⁶ The portrait data on age, nationality and nativity, and religious affiliation come from the *Dictionary of American Biography*; *PMHB* (particularly the pre-1920 issues); John W. Jordan et al., eds., *Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania*, 17 vols. (New York, 1911-1965); William Wade Hinshaw, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, II (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1938); denominational data on Anglicans and Lutherans in *Pa. Arch.*, 2d Ser., VIII, IX; *A Record of the Inscriptions on the Tablets and Grave-Stones in the Burial-Grounds of Christ Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1864); William White Bronson, *The Inscriptions in St. Peter's Church Yard, Philadelphia* (Camden, N. J., 1879); Norris Stanley Barratt, *Outline of the History of Old St. Paul's Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1917); and William Montgomery, "Pew Renters of Christ Church, St. Peter's, and St. James's from 1776 to 1815, Compiled from Existing Records" (1948), American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; manuscript Quaker meeting records on microfilm, Friends' Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa.; and manuscript records of Presbyterian congregations, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

For data on wealth and occupation I have relied principally on "A Transcript of the Assessment of the Seventeenth 18d. Provincial Tax for the City and County of Philadelphia, taken in April, 1774," Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pa., and on a contemporaneous official summary of that transcript, Department of Archives, Philadelphia City Hall, Philadelphia. Figures from this assessment have been supplemented by the 1775 18d. provincial tax assessment and the 1775 Philadelphia constables' assessment, Dept. of Arch., Philadelphia City Hall, and with a printed version of the 1774 summary, *Pa. Arch.*, 3d Ser. (Harrisburg, Pa., 1894-1899), XIV, XV.

Tax assessment figures are often misleading and sometimes completely inaccurate indexes of the wealth of particular individuals. The assumption made in the economic analysis of the committeemen presented in this article, however, is that such errors tend to average out so that alterations in the assessments of whole groups of men (the committees) bear some relationship to the collective wealth of these groups, especially when, as is the case with the committees, successive alterations form a clear trend.

among those whose ages are known are unmistakably clear. First, the committeemen were younger than members of the established government. In 1774 Pennsylvania's ten governor's councilors averaged 56 years of age, and twenty-two assemblymen whose ages are definitely known averaged 45.5 years. Yet on no city committee, at any time between 1765 and 1776, was the average age as great as 42, and on at least three committees the average fell below 40 (Tables I and II). Second, the membership of those committees that were the more radical in behavior was, in nearly every case, younger than that of the more cautious boards. This is especially noticeable in the 1770, 1773, and November 1774 committees, the last two of which also had the greatest turnover in membership of all the resistance bodies. Finally, although the known ages of the committeemen chosen in 1765 and of those elected in 1775 and 1776 average about the same, the trend through the decade shows a clear, if markedly irregular, age decline. Moreover, the surprisingly high age averages tabulated for the committeemen of 1775 and 1776 are almost certainly the result of inadequate data. The two committees elected in these two years contained by far the greatest proportion of men whose ages are not known. If, as seems plausible, their obscurity (which is reflected in a general dearth of information about them) indicates that their careers were in their early stages, it is probable that the average age of Philadelphia committeemen declined right up to independence. Significantly, the May 1774 resurgence of conservatism in resistance politics interrupted this decline, as many committee veterans of 1765 and 1769 joined the new city committee.

Wealth. The changing economic status of the committeemen, while paralleling the pattern of age change both in fluctuation and in general decline, presents a far clearer and more dramatic picture. Officials of the government were much wealthier than the committeemen. The ten councilors were assessed an average of £309 by the provincial tax officials in 1774, at a time when only one city taxpayer in ten owned over £40 in assessed property. Sixteen assemblymen living in the city averaged £211.5. Yet only two Revolutionary committees representing Philadelphia averaged more than £128, and the three boards elected after the meeting of the First Continental Congress all fell well under £100 in assessed wealth per member (Tables I and II).

Radicalism was generally paired in committee politics with modest fortune, as was conservatism with substantial wealth. The tea committee of 1773, which approved the destruction of the tea in Boston, was the

poorest board chosen before the convening of the First Continental Congress. The committee of May 20, 1774, the most conservative chosen in that year, was the wealthiest board since 1765 and far exceeded any of its four successors in economic standing. Similarly, the moderates' ticket in the November 1774 election averaged £105, but the radical slate only £83. After removing twenty-one notables who appear on both cards, one discovers thirty-nine moderates with an average assessment of £101, while thirty-nine radicals were rated at an average of only £59. Finally, the tendency of the committees to become less wealthy as they became larger and more radical was very pronounced, describing one downward slope in average assessments from 1765 to 1773, and a second, after a strong resurgence by the city's moderates and conservatives, from May 1774 to February 1776 (Figure 1).²⁷

Occupation. The ever more modest wealth of Philadelphia's committeemen was partly a function of their increasing youthfulness and of the city's growing disenchantment with those wealthy importers who traditionally enjoyed close connections with the established Quaker and proprietary factions. Fully as crucial, however, and far more demonstrable in quantitative terms, is the correlation between decreasing average wealth and a rapid increase, beginning in November 1774, in the acceptability of mechanics—artisans, petty manufacturers, and assorted shopkeepers—as political spokesmen (Table II and Figures 1 and 2).²⁸ This last development undoubtedly owed something to the election of very large committees as the Revolution reached a crisis. By 1775 the committees had more than enough seats for every wealthy merchant. This same factor of size also favored the recruitment of poorer men as leaders, and it may even have effected changes in the committees' age profiles.

Yet Philadelphia's mechanics did not enter radical politics automatically as the city's committees became larger. Between 1770 and 1774 Thomson and other radical merchants sought out and secured the sup-

²⁷ The reader should not assume that the writer has here slipped into the easy error of identifying the several committees as conservative or radical on the basis of age or wealth. Each board's degree of radicalism, relative to earlier and later committees, to current community standards, and to important policy questions, is quite clear from the contemporary literary evidence cited above.

²⁸ All persons labeled "merchants" in the 1774 and 1775 assessors' returns who were not elsewhere called retailers or craftsmen have been classified as merchants, regardless of the amount of their assessment. All artisans and manufacturers assessed £50 or more are also classified as merchants, because such persons were generally wholesalers and nascent industrialists. Professionals include doctors, lawyers, and ministers. "Others" include one farmer, several "gentlemen" without any known occupation, and the elder statesman Benjamin Franklin.

port of these men. Thereafter, from June 1774 until the Declaration of Independence, the mechanics organized themselves as a political force, formed alliances with radical young merchants and professionals, composed election tickets upon which they themselves appeared in increasing numbers, and swept first conservative and then moderate merchants from committee office.²⁹

The introduction of Philadelphia's mechanics into participatory politics had an immediate and profound impact upon the city's commitment to the Revolution. In 1765 and in 1769 middle-aged, wealthy, generally moderate merchants dominated both establishment politics and committee-led resistance activities. Between 1770 and 1773 resistance politics became more radical as younger and somewhat less wealthy merchants took control of the movement. A strong resurgence of more conservative Philadelphians in early 1774 again brought older and wealthier merchants into power. But Thomson's coalition of radical young merchants and newly mobilized artisans, carefully fostered by every radical strategist, finally broke the wealthy merchants' domination of the city's political life. In June 1774 three-fourths of the committeemen were merchants, while only one-tenth were mechanics. After November the merchants held two-thirds of the places and the mechanics over one-fourth. After August 1775 the artisans occupied one-third of the seats. And in February 1776 the merchants were able to secure less than one-half of the places on the city committee (Table II and Figure 2).³⁰ Their forty-seven members only slightly outnumbered the forty mechanic spokesmen, and many of these "merchants" were poor young men of trade who, in economic status at least, differed little from their artisan colleagues.

Ethnic Origins and Places of Birth. Just as those who were of only modest fortune and those who worked with their hands were finally having their day in Philadelphia politics, the city's Germans, together with other Philadelphians of several nationalities born outside Pennsylvania, discovered that the Revolution opened up dramatic new political opportunities. Between 1765 and May 1774 fifty-six English, Scots, Welsh, or Scotch-Irishmen, and three thoroughly assimilated Frenchmen served on city committees. Yet not one German was chosen for committee service

²⁹ Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 215, 217-218, 219-220, 227, 232, 254-255, 271, 273n, 277, 279-281, 290-291, 345-347, 351; Charles S. Olton, "Philadelphia's Mechanics in the First Decade of Revolution 1765-1775," *Journal of American History*, LIX (1972-1973), 311-326; sources cited in nn. 9, 16, and 20 above.

³⁰ For another count of the occupations of the committeemen of 1774, which discovers even more mechanics than I do, see Robert F. Oaks, "Philadelphia Merchants and the First Continental Congress," *Pa. Hist.*, XL (1973), 149-166, esp. 157-158.

in this period. Thus when Philadelphians placed five Germans on the city committee elected in June 1774, they brought that nationality, which comprised at least one-sixth and perhaps as much as one-fourth of the population of the city, into participatory politics for the first time. Thereafter, some 10 to 15 percent of the seats on the committees were always held by German-Americans, and in 1776, when the province became an independent commonwealth, Germans began entering the legislature in appreciable numbers for the first time in Pennsylvania's history.³¹

Perhaps more significant is the number of persons born outside the province who became prominent radical leaders. Joseph Reed had come from New Jersey, Thomas McKean from Delaware, John Dickinson from Maryland via Delaware, and Dr. Thomas Young from Albany, New York, by way of Boston, Newport, Rhode Island, and New York City. The principal foreign-born leaders included Robert Morris and Thomas Paine from England, and Thomson from Northern Ireland. Several more obscure committeemen were immigrants from Ulster and Germany. To some extent the political prominence of immigrants was natural, for a very large proportion of Pennsylvania's population in the 1770s was not Pennsylvania-born. But Scotch-Irish and German immigrants became far more prominent in the Revolution than they had ever been in either the economic or the political life of pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania. This is yet another indication of how thoroughly Pennsylvanians rejected their established, largely native-born leaders as they approached the Revolutionary crisis.

Religion. A strong commitment to the Revolutionary movement in Philadelphia would appear to have been closely connected with youth, modest income, and even a manual occupation or immigrant status. Were most Revolutionaries also members of just one or two religious faiths? The literary evidence strongly suggests this, indicating that the leading

³¹ See *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 16, 1774, Aug. 23, 1775, Feb. 21, 1776, for lists of committeemen. *Votes and Proceedings*, VIII, 7023-7024, and *Journals of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . .* (Philadelphia, 1782), give the number of Germans in the Assembly. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., estimates that about 1/6 of the city was German in the 1770s. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 14-15. However, the burial and baptismal figures given in "historical Notes and Memoranda respecting Philadelphia, etc.," Box 2, Item 161, 25, Proud Collection, Pa. Hist. Soc., and in *An Account of the Births and Burials in the United Churches of Christ-Church and St. Peter's . . . From December 25, 1774, to December 25, 1775* [Philadelphia, 1775], and *An Account of the Baptisms and Burials in all the Churches and Meetings in Philadelphia. From Dec. 25, 1774 to Dec. 25, 1775* [Philadelphia, 1775], suggest that between 1/5 and 1/4 of the city was German in the 1770s.

Revolutionaries were Presbyterians, that Quakers became neutrals or even Tories, and that Anglicans split, with the younger communicants tending toward radicalism. In general terms, our quantitative findings present much the same picture, yet the portrait data also reveal that the matter is not nearly so simple.

Religious divisions, in Philadelphia and throughout Pennsylvania, had long been intense, despite the traditional public display of harmony and good will among the province's many faiths. By the mid-eighteenth century these divisions were intimately connected with factional politics in both city and province. They were a determinative factor in Pennsylvania politics in the 1750s and early 1760s, and recent scholarship suggests that they may have been even more fundamental to political contention in the late 1770s and the 1780s.³²

In the coming of the Revolution, however, religion played a very different role. Several of the greatest radical organizers and propagandists in Philadelphia were indeed Presbyterians: Reed and McKean, who served as chairmen of several city committees; Paine's close friend, Dr. Benjamin Rush; James Cannon, author of the radical Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776; and Thomson. And it is also true that after 1775 Quakers could not engage in Revolutionary politics without risking disownment by the Society of Friends. Yet Thomas Mifflin was both a Quaker and a hero of the resistance until his service with the Continental Army led to disownment. Several other Philadelphians, raised as Quakers and many of them still Friends in good standing until 1775-1776—for example, Owen and Clement Biddle, Christopher Marshall, Sr., Timothy Matlack, Samuel Meredith, Samuel Morris, Jr., Thomas Wharton, Jr., and Dickinson—were important resistance leaders. The role of Philadelphia's Anglicans was fully as important. Without the zealous dedication to the cause of resistance on the part of John Nixon, George Clymer, Robert Morris, John Cadwalader, and scores of less prominent activists, the Revolution might well have failed in Philadelphia.

A quantitative assessment of the coincidence between religious affiliation and committee activity confirms this view (Tables I and II and Figure 3). To be sure, the most heavily Quaker committees tended to be the

³² The best recent treatments of the religious-political linkage in the 1760s are Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 200-243; Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway*, Chaps. 8-9; and Bockelman and Ireland, "Internal Revolution," *Pa. Hist.*, XLI (1974), 127-144. For a fresh and stimulating look at this relationship after the Declaration see Owen S. Ireland, "The Ethnic-Religious Dimension of Pennsylvania Politics, 1778-1779," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 423-448.

most moderate.³³ Conversely, in 1776 when Friends in good standing could no longer serve on Revolutionary committees, the political activity of all Quakers, whether in full membership or disowned, reached its nadir. Yet the most radical committees, if the least Quaker, were not the most Presbyterian, as the conventional wisdom on Revolutionary politics would lead one to expect. In fact, Anglicans were usually the most numerous group on the more radical boards. These committees were also more evenly balanced in religious composition than the more moderate boards that preceded them.

Throughout the Revolution the connections between religious affiliation and political activity were evident in relation to the imperial question, just as they had been in provincial matters. To Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, anti-London sentiment came easily, while the prospect of violent resistance would deter the Quakers, who were at once a pacifist sect and a minority experiencing a continuing relative economic and political decline in Pennsylvania. What is important here is the extent to which the committee movement overcame this natural pattern of political perception and behavior.

The most meaningful and potentially explosive divisions within Philadelphia may well have been those between the leading religious faiths, rather than between economic, occupational, or ethnic groups. To heal those divisions, the city's resistance leaders determined, early on, to secure religiously balanced, inclusive committees.³⁴ The result of their policy was not just show. The city's Anglicans, for example, were mobilized: they rallied, wrote, and fought for colonial autonomy. And conservative Quakers, who might easily have become a major obstacle to the Revolution, were quickly reduced to political impotence as over one hundred young, energetic, and often wealthy Friends abandoned the meetinghouse for the committee room or the drill field.³⁵ What is most striking in all this is

³³ Note esp. the number of Friends on the committees of 1765, 1769, and May 1774.

³⁴ See above pp. 569-570 and nn. 12 and 13 on Thomson's balanced denominational recruiting in May and June 1774. It should be mentioned here, however, that the balance and particularly the inclusiveness achieved in 1774-1776 were really impressive only in relation to the earlier committees. On the last three committees, the dominant Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Quakers together held at least 76% of the seats. According to the vital statistics cited in n. 31, however, these three groups composed only 39% of the city's population. Among these three faiths representation generally did follow population distribution; thus the greatest number of delegates were Anglican. Germans and British-descended members of minor sects, however, remained underrepresented right up to the Declaration.

³⁵ Records of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (center city), and of the Northern and Southern District Monthly Meetings (the suburbs), microfilm, Friends' Hist. Lib.

the cooperation between radicals of different religious faiths.

Change and Development. The foregoing discussion of the age, wealth, occupation, nationality, and religion of Philadelphia's committeemen manifests two distinct patterns of change in the eight years between the Townshend Act boycott and independence. First, those committees that were larger and that had a greater proportion of men new to committee activity (1773 and November 1774), those whose members were younger and poorer and included many artisans and shopkeepers (November 1774, 1775, and 1776), and those in which Quakers did not outnumber Anglicans or Presbyterians (1770, 1773, November 1774, and especially 1776) adopted a more radical stance than the older, wealthier, more veteran, more mercantile, and more Quaker boards (1765, 1769, and May 1774). Second, no matter how radical the committees became, they continued to draw their members from all major economic, occupational, ethnic, and religious groups within the city, and to keep the most powerful of these groups roughly in balance.

Several factors lay behind these two leadership patterns. First, the tendency for Philadelphia's younger and poorer men to become more radical than older and wealthier residents most probably relates to the former group's relatively small investment in the present compared with their much grander hopes for the future. Wealthy merchants over forty found it harder to take this attitude toward the Revolution. For middle-aged Quakers who were past their political and even their economic zenith, passive neutrality and even bitter reaction were natural responses to the imperial crisis, inadequate though they might be. All of this is speculation, however, and lies within the shadowy realm of the motivation of individuals long deceased. More central to our inquiry are the social and collective motives and methods whereby the young, the poor, and the mechanics, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, and the Germans came forward as many of the old elite faded, or were forced, into the background.

In part, these new men may have consciously seized on the imperial crisis as their opportunity to play a more important role in politics than even the veteran radicals who sought their support expected or desired. Between 1770 and 1774 the mechanics, in particular, readied themselves to take a leading part in public life.³⁶ Yet even in 1776, well-to-do and well-

³⁶ One may trace the gradual organization of the mechanics as a conscious, distinct political force in "A Brother Chip," *Pa. Gaz.*, Sept. 27, 1770; broadside by 10 candidates, *Fellow Citizens and Countrymen* (Philadelphia, Oct. 1, 1772); "At a

educated Philadelphians played the leading roles in city politics. In large measure, the changing composition of Philadelphia's political leadership was the product of a conscious, well-planned program, dimly visible as early as 1769-1770 and fully operational from June 1774 to independence. Philadelphia's committees were balanced and inclusive because those who composed the election tickets and led the boards had willed it so.³⁷ Philadelphia's radical leaders did not abandon elitist politics in the Revolution, but redefined them. It remains to consider why they did so, and to offer a few reflections on the results of their policy.

In 1765 Philadelphia's merchants appointed a small extra-constitutional board to administer a voluntary boycott of English imports. Just ten years later the full city electorate placed one hundred men on a committee that enforced a comprehensive embargo, aided the city militia in securing arms and ammunition, petitioned the Assembly for a new militia law and an expanded legislature, tried persons accused of obstructing the resistance and condemned those convicted to public ostracism, engaged in controlling propaganda in the city press, and served as the chief liaison group between Philadelphia and the Continental Congress. By 1775 Philadelphia's committees governed the city, not in law but in fact. This new government faced unprecedented duties of the most serious and taxing nature.

The primary reason for the expansion of political recruitment was the need for governmental, even bureaucratic, manpower. Every city district, eventually every block, had its committee delegates who scrutinized their neighbors for fidelity to the embargo and dedication in opposing British authority.³⁸ Merchants and mariners, manufacturers and craftsmen, shop-

Meeting of Respectable Inhabitants," June 17, 1774, and letter from the mechanics to Dickinson, June 27, 1774, Dickinson material, R. R. Logan Coll.; letter from a mechanic assembly to the city committee, July 8, 1774, 20-22, Du Simitière Coll., Pa. Hist. Soc.; notices of the election of the city committee of 66, *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23, 1774; *Pa. Packet*, Nov. 7, 1774; and in the 3 election tickets for the Aug. 1775 committee, 962.F. 70, 72, 73, Philadelphia Lib. Co. The best modern treatments of this process are Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 215, 217-218, 219-220, 227, 232, 254-255, 271, 273n, 277, 279-281, 290-291, 345-347, 351; Hutson, "Philadelphia's White Oaks," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 3-25; Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, Chap. 4; Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway*, 212-213; and Olton, "Philadelphia's Mechanics," *JAH*, LIX (1972-1973), 311-326.

³⁷ The winning ticket of Feb. 1776 and probably also that of Aug. 1775 (labeled "the mechanics' ticket" by a contemporary) were composed by leading active members of the respective existing city committees, and tended to be more balanced and inclusive in their ethnic, economic, and denominational dimensions than the opposing moderate slates. The winning ticket of Nov. 1774 appears to have been composed by leading radicals of the existing committee, chosen in June 1774, plus spokesmen of the city's mechanics. See the election tickets cited in nn. 16 and 20; *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 2, 9, 1774; and Duane, ed., *Passages from Marshall*, 65.

³⁸ The committeemen elected in Nov. 1774, Aug. 1775, and Feb. 1776 were

keepers, printers, and lawyers all turned their talents and knowledge to governing the community and keeping it zealous and faithful in the cause of resistance, both in word and in deed.

To achieve their tasks Philadelphia's Revolutionary leaders sought many men who possessed both general and specific talents and who enjoyed the best possible connections with Philadelphia's many subcultures. Strategists of the resistance movement quickly appreciated not only the need for manpower, but also the impression of power and legitimacy that numbers would lend to their cause. Thus Thomson observed: "The Committee . . . which was elected [in 1775] . . . was, for the purpose of giving them more weight and influence, increased to the number of one hundred."³⁹ And as Philadelphians of all occupations took their committee seats, the merchants began watching the wharves and warehouses, the mariners set to inspecting ships, the manufacturers and artisans turned to procuring armaments and war supplies, the shopkeepers began observing their fellow retailers, and the lawyers started talking and writing to, and negotiating with, everyone about everything.

Numbers, then, provided the basic muscle of Revolutionary politics, impressed and persuaded the public, and afforded a broad range of expertise. They gave the Revolution another dimension as well. A committee of one hundred men could represent a city of twenty-five thousand in a way that no board of twenty could.⁴⁰ The use of larger bodies permitted the constant communication—the passing up from freemen to public officials of attitudes, needs, and desires, and the passing down to the freemen of orders, resolves, and explanations—that Philadelphia needed in the stress of revolutionary times.

Moreover, this intimate and intense form of representation did not involve twenty-five thousand undifferentiated constituents. Pennsylvania was run by English and Welsh Quaker and Anglican merchants and farmers, plus a few Scots and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. The majority of artisans, Germans, and Scotch-Irish were at best on the periphery of the political community. Their talents and drive, fully harnessed in the economy, were lost to the polity. This was perhaps unimportant before 1765, when the city and province were seldom subjected to great political or military pressure from outside forces. In the Revolution, however, to disregard so much manpower—so desperately needed in combating an

evenly divided up and assigned to six geographical districts covering the city and the suburbs for the purpose of observing all importing, exporting, and wholesale and retail trade. *Pa. Gaz.*, Dec. 7, 1774, Aug. 30, 1775, Feb. 26, 1776.

³⁹ "Papers of Thomson," *N.Y. Hist. Soc., Colls.*, XI (1878), 283.

⁴⁰ For this estimate of the city's population see Warner, *Private City*, 12.

external foe and defeating its internal sympathizers—was unthinkable for the city's radical organizers. The last function of increasing popular participation in committee politics, then, was to draw a greater proportion of the community into resistance activity. The Revolution tore Pennsylvania politics wide open. Hundreds of theretofore obscure Anglicans, Presbyterians, Germans, Baptists, craftsmen, and shopkeepers grasped this occasion to take part in the public life of their community.

In the 1770s Pennsylvanians began to enter the age of mass politics. While both the concept and the practice of elitist leadership were very much alive in Revolutionary Pennsylvania, they were evolving rapidly under the impact of an enlarged public role for the ordinary freeman. Between 1774 and the Jeffersonian era, Pennsylvania politics would exhibit an ever-changing blend of older elitist and newer mass-oriented elements. This was new in eighteenth-century politics. It has been suggested that the world's first modern political parties appeared in Pennsylvania in the late 1770s and the 1780s.⁴¹ And it was the Philadelphia committee movement that initiated this transition.

The mass mobilization that accompanied the recruitment of a new and broader elite led to the rapid achievement of the radicals' basic goal. In 1774 and 1775 Pennsylvania's governmental institutions yielded to the popular demand for broad resistance to British authority. In 1776 the established order, after belatedly attempting to draw the line at independence, quickly collapsed under the onslaught of Pennsylvania's Revolutionary recruits. Without the creation of this new leadership by the committee movement, it is most doubtful that independence could have come to Pennsylvania except through the violent coercion of Continental regiments and a civil war. In the 1760s and early 1770s Pennsylvania lacked nearly every ingredient for revolution found variously in the New England colonies and in Virginia: a strong dissenting tradition, widely felt economic grievances, or a legislature intimately acquainted with royal government.⁴² Only the painstaking enlistment of a strong leadership core, the construction of new political institutions, and the rapid mobilization of the majority of the community could overcome these deficiencies. In Pennsylvania British authority succumbed to the activity of a few hundred men who were drawn into public life by perhaps twenty veteran politicians within just two years. To these men and to their committees Pennsylvania owed its Revolution.

⁴¹ William Nisbet Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776-1809* (New York, 1963), 19-20.

⁴² Philadelphia's Quakers were, of course, dissenters. Due to their pacifism, however, their dissent did not present as sharp a challenge to the established order of the British Empire as did that of the Calvinist denominations.

TABLE I
COMPARATIVE PROFILE OF PHILADELPHIA'S RESISTANCE COMMITTEES, 1765 TO 1773

Committee	Merchants' Committee Oct. 1765	Merchants' Committee Mar. 1769	Merchants' Committee Sept. 1770	Tea Committee Dec. 1773
No. of Members	11	20	20	24
Persistence ^a	27%	55%	30%	38%
Long-term Continuity ^b	--	30%	60%	29%
Age ^c				
20-29	-	2	5	3
30-39	5	8	7	9
40-49	2	6	6	5
50-59	2	1	1	2
Unknown	2	1	1	5
Average ^d	41.0	40.8	36.8	38.8
Occupation				
Merchant	9	20	17	17
Mechanic	2	-	1	1
Professional	-	-	2	2
Unknown	-	-	-	4
Wealth (£)				
0-49	2	2	4	9
50-99	1	3	3	5
100-199	2	12	9	4
200+	4	1	3	3
Unknown	2	2	1	3
Average	191	128	126	89
Religion				
Quaker	6	8	5	4
Anglican	1	6	7	8
Presbyterian	2	6	6	5
Other	-	-	1	3
Unknown	3	-	-	4

Notes:

^a The percentage of the members of each committee who served on the succeeding committee.

^b The percentage of the members of each committee who had served on any earlier committee, including the seven-man delegation (not discussed in this article) that called on John Hughes to resign his commission as Stamp Agent in 1765.

^c In the year of each committee's formation.

^d Based on exact known ages only: 7 of 11 in 1765, 14 of 20 in 1769, 15 of 20 in 1770, and 16 of 24 in 1773. The decennial breakdowns, in contrast, include both ages known exactly and those known approximately or estimated from tax data.

Sources:

Lists of the committeemen (partial for 1769) appear in Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 315-317; Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 79; *Pa. Gaz.*, June 10, Sept. 20, 27, 1770; *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), Oct. 1, 1770; *Pa. Gaz.*, Oct. 20, 1773; and Philadelphia tea committee to Boston, Dec. 25, 1773, Reed Papers.

TABLE II
COMPARATIVE PROFILE OF PHILADELPHIA'S
FIVE MAJOR RADICAL COMMITTEES, MAY 1774-FEBRUARY 1776

Date of Election	May 1774	June 1774	Nov. 1774	Aug. 1775	Feb. 1776
No. of Members	19	43	66	100	100
Persistency	89%	42%	67%	69%	--
Long-term Continuity	68%	58%	35%	49%	73%
Age					
20-29	-	-	3	3	4
30-39	7	16	29	30	29
40-49	11	17	14	19	18
50-59	-	5	5	7	7
60+	1	1	2	4	4
Unknown	-	3	13	37	38
Average ^a	41.8	41.9	39.4	41.5	41.1
Occupation					
Merchant	15	33	44	54	47
Mechanic	1	4	18	35	40
Professional	3	3	3	4	5
Other	-	3	-	4	4
Unknown	-	-	1	3	4
Wealth (£)					
0-49	6	16	35	57	62
50-99	3	10	12	17	14
100-199	7	12	12	14	10
200+	3	5	6	9	7
Unknown	-	-	1	3	8
Average	155	112	82	73	64
Religion ^b					
Quaker	8	14	18	29	22
Anglican	5	8	20	26	30
Presbyterian	5	11	18	18	21
Baptist	1	3	1	2	3
Lutheran	-	2	3	2	2
Other	-	1	2	-	1
Unknown	-	4	4	23	21

Notes:

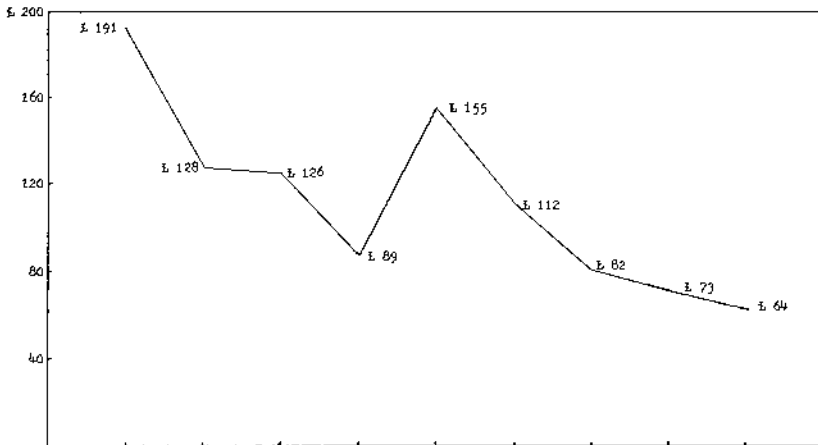
^a Based on exact known ages only: 16 of 19 in May 1774, 35 of 43 in June 1774, 41 of 66 in Nov. 1774, 51 of 100 in Aug. 1775, and 48 of 100 in Feb. 1776. The decennial breakdowns, as in Table I, include both ages known exactly and those known approximately or estimated.

^b Including Friends disowned or inactive before 1774: 3 of 8 on the May 1774 board, 3 of 14 in June 1774, 5 of 14 in Nov. 1774, 8 of 29 in Aug. 1775, and 7 of 22 in Feb. 1776.

Sources:

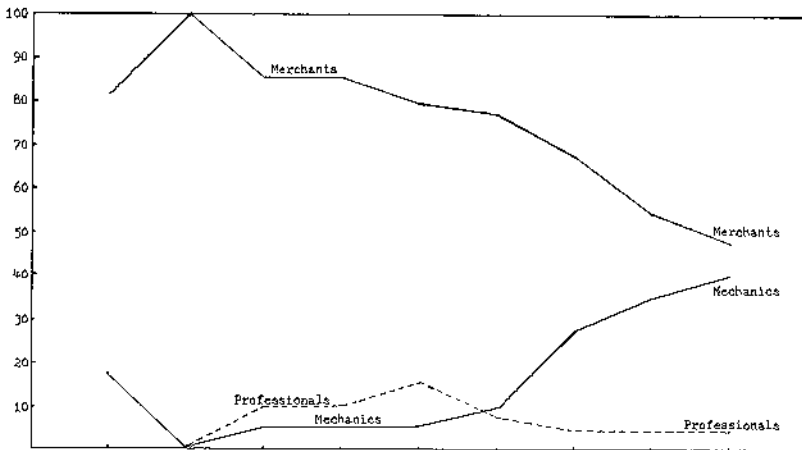
The committee lists appear in *Pa. Gaz.*, May 25, June 22, Nov. 23, 1774, Aug. 23, 1775, Feb. 21, 1776.

FIGURE 1
Average Assessed Wealth of the Philadelphia Committees, 1765 to 1776



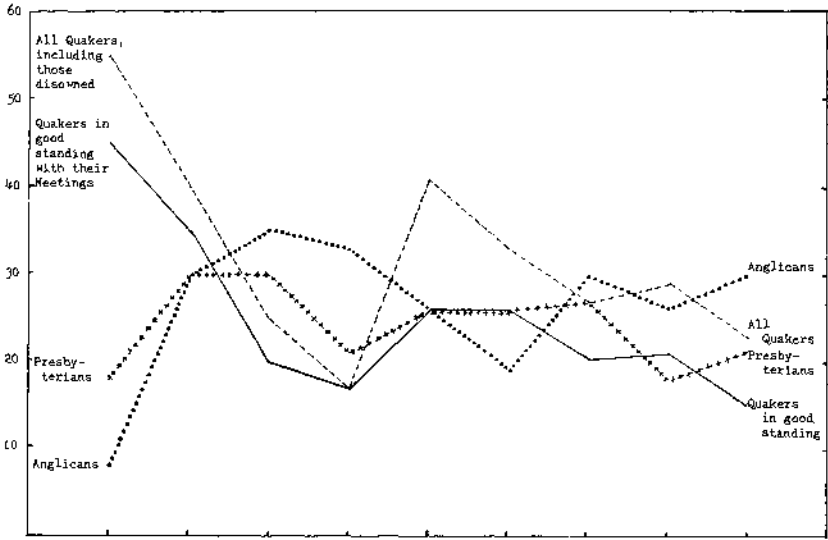
Date of committee:	10/1765	3/1769	3/1770	12/1773	5/1774	6/1774	11/1774	8/1775	2/1776
Known assessments:	9	18	19	21	19	43	65	97	93
Number of members:	11	20	20	24	19	43	66	100	100

FIGURE 2
Percentages of Merchants, Mechanics, and Professionals on the Philadelphia Committees, 1765 to 1776



Date of committee:	10/1765	3/1769	9/1770	12/1773	5/1774	6/1774	11/1774	8/1775	2/1776
Known occupations:	11	20	20	20	19	43	65	97	96
Number of members:	11	20	20	24	19	43	66	100	100

FIGURE 3
 Percentages of Committeemen Known to Have Been Quakers, Anglicans, or
 Presbyterians, 1765 to 1776



Date of committee	10/1/1765	2/1/1769	9/1/1770	12/1/1773	5/1/1774	6/1/1774	11/1/1774	8/1/1775	2/1/1776
Known affiliations: 8	20	20	20	20	19	39	62	77	79
Number of members:	11	20	20	24	19	43	66	100	100