The Grenville ministry (1763–1765): Wilkes and America

It was a widespread assumption in 1763 that Bute had resigned as Prime Minister with the intention of becoming George III's secret background adviser, enjoying power without responsibility. Active politicians could not envisage any other explanation: Lord Bristol commented to Pitt that Grenville would be 'the phantom of a prime minister';¹ and Newcastle summarised opinion at Westminster for the British ambassador at The Hague. 'People generally think, that my Lord Bute will be minister behind the Curtain, though his Lordship absolutely denies it.'² Bute had no intention of playing any such role, as he had assured Secretaries of State Egremont and Halifax on his resignation.³ But his sovereign would not allow him to withdraw from the political scene. George III insisted on informing and consulting him on political matters during April, at the rate of a letter a day.⁴ This correspondence was curtailed when the favourite went to the Yorkshire spa of Harrogate for the month of May, but after Bute's return to London on 1 June the King began to use him again as his political go-between. Bute was deputed to sound opposition leaders about joining the ministry, ostensibly to fill the office of Lord President of the Council, vacant since the death of Lord Granville in January.⁵ Matters came to a head after George III, contrary to 'the positive and repeated advice' of the Triumvirate, formally instructed Egremont in mid-July to offer the post to Hardwicke, with the prospect of some office also for Newcastle. Hardwicke promptly rejected the offer, declaring 'they would never come into office, but as a party and upon a plan concerted with Mr Pitt and the great Whig Lords, as had been practised in the late King's time'.⁶

The behaviour of George III had made the early months of the Grenville ministry a political stalemate, as Lord Chesterfield noted.

'The Triumvirate did nothing, because they had not the power; and Lord Bute did nothing, though he had the power, because he would not have it thought that he had'.⁷ George III's approach to the opposition provoked the ministry into confrontation with the King. He was visited by Grenville on 2 August, and the two Secretaries of State the next day, with the demand that he must choose either 'to stand by and support his administration' or 'to form another by taking in the opposition'. He was given only two days to consider this ultimatum, but Grenville agreed on 'ten days or a fortnight' as 'more decent'.⁸ George III, aware now that the Newcastle party would insist on a coalition with Pitt, opted for an approach to the Duke of Bedford, made by Bute through Shelburne. The Duke agreed to take the Treasury if Pitt would join his ministry: but this scheme was aborted when Pitt refused to serve with anyone concerned in the Peace of Paris.⁹ George III therefore had no choice but to assure Grenville that he would retain and support his ministry. Hardly had he done so on 21 August than Lord Egremont suddenly died the same day, through apoplexy.

What happened next reflected muddle and deception by George III. Having told both Grenville and Bedford that he would not send for Pitt, he informed Grenville on 26 August that he intended to call in Pitt 'to the management of his affairs, declaring that he meant to do it as cheap as he could, and to make as few changes as was possible'. Grenville expressed astonishment at this volte-face, and refused to be party to any such arrangement. George III nevertheless saw Pitt the next day, and offered him the post of Southern Secretary in an apparently otherwise unaltered ministry. Pitt countered with a demand for a complete change of administration. Lord Temple must be at the Treasury, and Charles Townshend the Northern Secretary and Commons Leader, Newcastle was to become Lord Privy Seal, and Hardwicke Lord President of the Council. This would be another Pitt-Newcastle coalition. Pitt bluntly told the King that he intended 'to break this government, which was not founded on true Revolution principles, that it was a Tory Administration'.¹⁰

George III, deeming Pitt's demands unreasonable, now had to eat humble pie. Admitting to Grenville on 28 August that 'he had no right after what had passed to expect a compliance', he said he now realised 'that it was necessary the direction should be in one man's hands only, and he meant it should be in his'. When Grenville raised the question of 'secret influence', the King assured him that 'Lord Bute desired to retire absolutely from all business whatsoever, that he would absent himself from the King for a while'. The next day George III told Pitt

his proposals were unacceptable, and assured Grenville of his full support.¹¹ To bind his sovereign into fulfilment of his promises Grenville drafted a circular letter to his leading supporters, which he read out to the King on 3 September. This stated that George III had in the recent negotiations merely sought to fill up the vacant posts of Lord President and Southern Secretary; that he had promised full support to Grenville; and that Lord Bute was retiring from politics and would absent himself from the King's presence 'until the suspicion of his influence on public business shall be entirely removed'.¹² No prior royal approval was obtained, and some copies of the letter had been sent out before Grenville obtained the King's consent. The astonished Sir John Philipps sent a copy to Bute, who was angry at this public use of a private promise.¹³ He duly passed the winter at his Bedfordshire home of Luton Hoo, and on his return to London in April 1764 did not discuss political issues with either the King or Grenville, merely some matters of patronage. When in May 1765 Grenville stipulated that the King should not consult Bute on politics, George III replied in amazement that he had not done so since August 1763.¹⁴

Grenville had neatly trapped the King and removed Bute from influence. There remained the reconstruction of the ministry. Bute's adherent Lord Shelburne, embarrassingly involved in the August negotiations, resigned as President of the Board of Trade, and by the end of the year had been attracted to Pitt's orbit. He was replaced by Lord Hillsborough, a friend of both Grenville and Halifax. The most significant aspect of the reshuffle was the complete integration of the Bedford group within the ministry. The Duke now knew of Pitt's proscription of him, while Egremont's death and Bute's loss of influence removed his personal objections to taking office. He became Lord President of the Council, while his ally Sandwich moved from the Admiralty to become Northern Secretary, Halifax choosing to transfer to the Southern Department 'upon account of the colonies'.¹⁵ Lord Egmont, formerly a Leicester House man, was appointed to the Admiralty.

The political crisis of August 1763 resulted in the emergence of Grenville as sole Minister, as the real Prime Minister he had expected to be in April, for the King promised not only to give up Bute but also full support against his Bedfordite colleagues. The episode also witnessed the increasing polarisation of active politicians into factions. In that sense the opposition comprised two, the band of Pitt admirers and the Newcastle group designating itself the Whigs as the heir to the dominant party of George II's reign, but now reduced to the status of a faction. Within the ministry were the Bedford group and that now

forming around Grenville. Bute's followers, though often listed as such by contemporaries for some years and revived as a group by his brief return to politics in 1766, were already gradually merging into the general body of the Court Party.

Grenville's establishment in power came only a few weeks before the next Parliamentary session. Political analyses suggested that the Prime Minister would have little difficulty in the House of Commons. On 4 November Thomas Hunter produced a calculation for his Treasury Board colleagues of 349 ministerial supporters there, with 200 MPs as opposition or doubtful.¹⁶ But Grenville knew well enough the contrast between paper majorities and political reality. They could melt away in the face of sustained attacks by opposition spokesmen, and it was the widespread contemporary opinion that the opposition had the best Commons speakers, notably William Pitt, Charles Townshend, and Henry Legge. Henry Fox had gone to the House of Lords, and Grenville himself was not thought to be up to the task of Commons Leader, after his poor showing in the session of 1761–62. Lord Chesterfield observed on 30 September that 'there is not a man of the Court side, in the House of Commons, who has either abilities or words enough to call a coach'.¹⁷ How well Grenville rose to the occasion is implicit in the comment of another man with a low opinion of him, Lord Holland, the former Henry Fox, who wrote in December 1765, when Grenville was in opposition. 'Mr Grenville, who never was thought to speak well, till he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, is now again the most wretched speaker in the House'.¹⁸

What gave point to this concern about Parliament was the expectation of a major controversy there. For in the opinion of both George III and the Grenville cabinet John Wilkes had at last exposed himself to prosecution for his weekly *North Briton*, when in the forty-fifth issue on 23 April he had attacked the King's Speech at the end of the previous Parliamentary session in terms that the Crown's law officers, Attorney-General Charles Yorke and Solicitor-General Sir Fletcher Norton, deemed 'a scandalous and seditious libel', adding that 'all libels, being breaches of the peace' were outside the Parliamentary privilege of immunity from arrest.¹⁹ Official action was prompted by George III himself, and on 26 April Secretary of State Halifax issued a general warrant, not naming those to be arrested, for the apprehension of 'the authors, printers and publishers' of the anonymous paper. Verbal and written evidence was soon obtained that Wilkes was the author, and he was arrested under the same warrant, on 30 April. Secretaries of State Egremont and Halifax favoured the issue of a new

warrant naming Wilkes, but their law clerk Lovell Stanhope and the Treasury solicitor Philip Webb deemed that step to be unnecessary.²⁰ The whole storm over general warrants arose from their advice. Six days later Wilkes was released on the ground of Parliamentary privilege, a controversial decision by Chief Justice Pratt, amid shouts of ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ by a mob ignorant of legal niceties. That aspect of the case was irrelevant to the key issue of general warrants, a device often used to arrest spies and other anonymous enemies of the state. But even before 1763 doubts had been raised as to its legality, and the arrest of some fifty persons in the *North Briton* case aroused widespread alarm about the potential threat to individual liberty. Wilkes denounced it as ‘a ridiculous warrant against the whole English nation’. Although condemnation of what Wilkes had written was almost universal, the Parliamentary opposition would undoubtedly seek to harass the administration over general warrants.

During the summer recess of Parliament a whole series of lawsuits arose from the episode, Lord Temple playing a crucial role by financing Wilkes. His prosecution for libel was countered by actions for trespass, damage and unlawful arrest, forty-six writs being issued on 26 May alone. Many of these cases came to court, fourteen printers being awarded damages in July. There was also a lively press campaign on both sides. Caught up in the general excitement, Wilkes made the fateful decisions of reprinting *North Briton Number Forty-Five* and privately printing a few copies of an obscene poem *Essay on Woman* that he had written in 1754. Both would expose him to legal retribution.²¹

Before Parliament met the ministry lost its Attorney-General. Charles Yorke, son of Lord Hardwicke, resigned on 2 November, finding himself on the wrong side of the political fence when a clear alignment between administration and opposition developed after the August negotiations. Yorke’s behaviour highlighted the adjustments of individual politicians to the new situation. In February 1764 James Harris of the Treasury Board calculated that there had been fifty-six desertions from the ministry in the House of Commons. They included ten in the Yorke family grouping; six in that headed by Lord George Sackville; and four followers of Shelburne, who had joined Pitt.²²

The ministry duly formulated its Parliamentary resolutions, that the offending issue of the *North Briton* was a seditious libel and that Parliamentary privilege did not cover this crime, thereby exposing Wilkes to legal retribution. He would then be expelled from the Commons, not as a punishment but as an unworthy member. Grenville made it clear to his colleagues and supporters that the successful enactment of

this strategy would be deemed a vote of confidence in his ministry, but that was not much of a hostage to fortune, in view of what most MPs thought of Wilkes and his libel. To reinforce that hostile opinion, the ministry attempted a character assassination of Wilkes when Parliament met on 15 November. For Lord Sandwich then read out parts of the *Essay on Woman* to the House of Lords, on a specious pretext that the obscene and impious poem was a breach of privilege.²³

In the House of Commons that day the ministerial motion, put by Lord North of the Treasury Board, that the forty-fifth issue of the *North Briton* was 'a false, scandalous and seditious libel' was carried by 273 votes to 111 after long debates totalling 82 speeches, 15 of them by Pitt. Many thought he demeaned himself by his vigorous defence of Wilkes. During the debate Buteite MP Samuel Martin denounced the anonymous author as 'a cowardly rascal', and next day Wilkes fought a pistol duel with him, being so badly wounded that he would be unable to attend Parliament again that year. Proceedings against him nevertheless continued. On 24 November North moved the resolution that Parliamentary privilege did not cover seditious libel. He argued that although only treason, felony and breach of the peace were specifically named as exceptions to the immunity from arrest enjoyed by MPs, the distinction was between criminal offences and civil ones. Pitt, though denouncing his former supporter Wilkes as 'an impious criminal', spoke for two hours against the motion, which was carried by 258 votes to 133. Next day the House of Lords endorsed the Commons resolutions by 114 votes to 35: six of the King's detested Dukes were in the minority, Bolton, Cumberland, Devonshire, Grafton, Newcastle, and Portland.²⁴

Intense popular interest was generated by the whole sequence of events, and a series of riots in London resulted, notably after a first legal condemnation of general warrants by Judge Pratt on 6 December, for their use to search unspecified houses. The press celebrated that 'every Englishman' could now claim that 'his house is his castle'.²⁵ During the court proceedings Solicitor-General Norton failed to prove the authorship of the *North Briton* by Wilkes, and henceforth the legal charge against him was merely that of republishing the libel. Wilkes now fled any trials, evading surveillance to escape in late December to France, where he was to spend four years in exile.²⁶

Parliamentary and legal proceedings against Wilkes continued in his absence, but Norton, now Attorney-General, advised the ministry to avoid any direct Parliamentary vote on the popular topic of general warrants. On 19 January 1764 North put two motions to the

Commons, that Wilkes was guilty of writing and publishing the relevant *North Briton*, and that he be expelled. Only one MP voiced dissent, for the Parliamentary opposition shunned Wilkes, William Pitt and Newcastle's chief Commons spokesman Henry Legge being deliberately absent. But the ministry could not expect such an easy time over general warrants, where the sacred cause of 'liberty' was under threat. What followed was one of the great Parliamentary battles of the century. A series of long debates, punctuated by the examination of witnesses, culminated on 17 February in a motion by opposition MP Sir William Meredith condemning as illegal the use of general warrants in cases of seditious libel. Norton moved to postpone the resolution for four months, ostensibly lest it prejudice pending legal cases, but tactically to avoid losing support in a direct vote. The longest Commons debate in memory ended at 7.30 the next morning, with a ministerial majority of just 14: 232 to 218. Sir Lewis Namier long ago pointed out that the administration was saved only by a solid Scottish vote, based on personal hatred of Wilkes.²⁷ But even defeat would not have toppled the Grenville ministry. The Prime Minister had completed the series of measures against Wilkes on which he had staked his reputation, and the King had already assured him that he would pay no heed to any defeat over general warrants. Both men knew that few of the deserters over such a popular question, whether placemen or independents, intended to bring down the ministry, and had already agreed not to dismiss any office-holders. The jubilation of the opposition at the prospect of a change of ministry was baseless delusion.²⁸ After the debate Treasury Secretary Charles Jenkinson listed 49 MPs in the minority 'who are friends or nearly so'.²⁹ That that desertion by many independent members was only over general warrants was soon demonstrated by a deliberate gesture. On 21 February numerous squires concerted their attendance at the Prime Minister's levee as evidence of their continuing support.³⁰

The Parliamentary excitement had barely subsided before the trial of Wilkes for libel took place, on 21 February. As Wilkes never later failed to point out, the charges merely concerned publication, not authorship. It was his May 1763 reprinting of the *North Briton* that formed the basis for the charge of 'seditious and scandalous libel', and his private printing of the *Essay on Woman* for one of 'obscene and impious libel'. The facts of publication were not in doubt, and Wilkes was found guilty on both counts. When he failed to return from France to receive sentence, he was outlawed in November. Some compensation for his exile came with news of further condemnation of

general warrants in 1764 and 1765, this time by Chief Justice Lord Mansfield. By ending their use for the arrest of persons, these rulings complemented the Pratt judgment on trespass.³¹

Simultaneously with that first Wilkes case the Grenville ministry faced a more direct legacy of the Bute ministry, West Country hostility to the cider tax. During the 1763 summer recess of Parliament Cornwall, Devonshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Somerset and Worcestershire sent in county petitions calling for repeal of the tax. So did 17 boroughs within these counties, Leominster submitting two, together with the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers and the City of London, as usual eager to stir up trouble for government. Devonshire, 9 of whose 13 constituencies submitted petitions, formed the heart of the campaign, for it was masterminded by bookseller Benjamin Heath, town clerk of Exeter. That borough paid for a widely circulated pamphlet in which Heath urged these six counties, which returned altogether 113 MPs to Westminster, to follow the example of Scotland, whose MPs supported national interests even in preference to their notorious compliance with ministerial demands. Heath urged the cider MPs to lobby the Prime Minister at the opening of the next Parliamentary session and make their support conditional on repeal. This phenomenon of local political movements that owed little to the initiative of MPs was a new mid-century development, and one revived in the West Country at the end of the decade, when the area submitted a disproportionately large number of petitions on a second Wilkes case.³²

The cider tax agitation was a political complication that Grenville could have done without, faced as he was with a major crisis over the *North Briton* case. With characteristic preparation he thought out what tactic to adopt, as he told Treasury Lord James Harris on 29 October. Repeal was not an option, and he would oppose it in Parliament. Nor would he regard defeat as a vote of no confidence, since the tax was not his measure. But he was willing to accept alterations in the method of collecting the tax.³³ After the customary pre-session meeting of ministerial MPs on 14 November, when Harris noted that among the 250 MPs present were 'most of the Tories, those even of the cider counties', Grenville met fifteen 'principal gentlemen' from the West Country.³⁴ On 18 November Grenville had further discussions with the three leaders of the movement, Worcestershire MP William Dowdeswell, Devonshire MP Sir Richard Bampfylde, and Herefordshire MP Velters Cornewall.³⁵ At a gathering of cider MPs on 21 November the majority were inclined to accept Grenville's

compromise, and this became clear when Dowdeswell opened the Parliamentary campaign on 24 January 1764 by moving for a Committee on the Cider Act.

Grenville, to prevent any discussion there of repeal, moved an amendment that the Committee should discuss only alteration. He pointed out that the tax revenue was already pledged to cover interest on the National Debt, and that repeal would make necessary another tax instead. Moreover, such a precedent would lead to demands for repeal of the beer and similar taxes. Grenville announced the firm stance he had long devised, stating that he would offer no concession if repeal was put on the agenda, and this tactic worked, even though some Newcastle men, Lord George Cavendish and Thomas Townshend among them, sought to exploit the situation and drive a wedge between the cider members and the ministry by advocating complete repeal. Disgusted Pittite MP James Grenville reported to Lady Chatham how, with the honourable exception of Dowdeswell, the cider members expressed ‘a zeal for the support of the present ministers, even to adulation ... In short, the Tory party showed itself in its true colour of devoted attachment to the court’.³⁶ Even so, Grenville only carried his amendment by 167 votes to 125.³⁷

When the Cider Committee met on 31 January Dowdeswell, prevented from proposing repeal, moved to transfer the tax from the makers to the retailers. That would remove most of the tax burden from the cider counties, and Grenville opposed it for that reason. He intended to retain a tax that had yielded £30,000 in the first year. Dowdeswell’s motion failed by only twenty votes, 172 to 152.³⁸ On 7 February the Cider Committee agreed, without voting, on a compromise whereby individuals could compound for the tax at two shillings each, children under eight being exempt. But on 10 February Sir Richard Bampfylde, under constituency pressure and contrary to his own opinion as professed on 24 January, moved to repeal the cider tax altogether. Dowdeswell was among those who spoke in support, but the motion was defeated by 204 votes to 115, with many squires from outside the cider counties swelling the majority. The stand by Grenville did not cost him support over general warrants, diarist Harris noting that ‘most of the cider members’ were in a majority of 217 to 122 on 6 February.³⁹

The political temperature fell after the excitement over the cider tax and general warrants, and Grenville had an easy time in the House of Commons for the American measures he now introduced. The opposition was disheartened after the failure to defeat him on general

warrants, and for a variety of reasons their leading spokesmen were absent: illness kept William Pitt and Henry Legge away, parental deaths and other factors Charles Yorke and Charles Townshend. Grenville and his colleagues had meanwhile not allowed the Wilkes furore to distract them from devising colonial measures, and even before Parliament met the ministry had enacted a land settlement for North America. Egremont and Grenville, in their first territorial plan, had proposed to include in a new colony of Quebec the area south of the Great Lakes, between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, known then as 'the old North-West'. That was agreed by the cabinet on 8 July. But the Board of Trade, after news of an Indian rising under Chief Pontiac, deemed it wiser to leave it as an Indian reservation. After Egremont's death Grenville found himself alone in objecting to this policy and gave way, though uneasy about the lack of any form of government for that wilderness.⁴⁰ Halifax and Hillsborough, now Southern Secretary and President of the Board of Trade respectively, drafted the Proclamation of 7 October 1763, creating three new colonies of Quebec, East Florida, and West Florida, which was a coastal strip to the Mississippi. Settlement was otherwise prohibited between the Mississippi and the Atlantic mountain watershed, where local officials were to map out the so-called Proclamation Line to that end. The royal prerogative was deemed sufficient authority for that measure, but others were being devised to come before Parliament early in 1764.⁴¹

For decades British politicians and colonial officials had been concerned about evasion of the customs laws in North America, especially the breach of the 1733 Molasses Act imposing what was intended as a prohibitory import duty of 6*d* a gallon on foreign molasses, used to make rum. By 1763 it was obvious that the British West Indies could not supply British North America, and the conversion of this duty to a revenue one of 3*d* was deemed likely to satisfy both colonial rum distillers and also the British Treasury, as the first step in providing finance for the American army: such a scheme had been killed by Grenville when prematurely proposed by Charles Townshend in March 1763, but he now adopted the idea. It was preferred to another potential source of revenue contemplated by the Treasury Board, 'a sort of capitation tax' as Treasury Lord James Harris described it.⁴² A poll tax would have been even more unpopular in America than the revenue duties actually imposed!

Many other provisions to curb smuggling and alter duties were included in a comprehensive American Duties Bill for 1764. When Grenville opened his budget on 9 March he also announced his

intention to raise additional colonial revenue by stamp duties, to be levied on legal documents, newspapers and other items, as they had been in Britain since the seventeenth century. This Stamp Bill had been under preparation since September 1763. In his speech Grenville threw out a challenge, which was not taken up, that he would force a vote over Parliament's right to tax America if any MP doubted it. The budget debate focused on this new idea of colonial taxation. Sir William Baker, deputed to speak for the Newcastle group, approved the idea of stamp duties, but when it was attacked as unfair Grenville at once accepted a suggestion that the colonies should first be informed, and the measure was postponed for a year. He later met the colonial agents, on 17 May, and explained that he was open to suggestions for alternative Parliamentary taxation, but that was the extent of his concession.⁴³ In 1770 Grenville, when talking of the Stamp Act, recalled that 'the King was particularly desirous to have it, and frequently called on him (Mr. G.) to bring it on. That he had told his M. it should be done, and wished it might be done, as it was, deliberately'.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether this royal pressure was exerted when Grenville postponed the measure in 1764 or at its introduction in 1765; but the story adds a new, royal, dimension to the usual version of the taxation of America.

When the American Duties Bill came before Parliament there was no challenge to the molasses revenue duty on principle, but in Committee on 22 March an amendment was put to lower it to 2d a gallon, the rate sought by the colonial agents. Grenville estimated the revenue from a 3d duty at £50,000, and it was confirmed on a division by 147 votes to 55, the minority being composed of the Newcastle group and some American merchants. Charles Yorke absented himself, and Charles Townshend did not speak, being dismayed by the lack of cooperation from the absent Pitt, who, so he told Newcastle, 'is against *all* taxation'.⁴⁵ Townshend held the opposite view, and intended to attack Grenville for producing only a derisory American revenue. Both Newcastle and Rockingham supported this idea, so contrary to their own later policy, but Townshend let them down. The Parliamentary debates of 1764 reflected an assumption of the right to tax America, and a unanimity of opinion that the colonies ought to contribute to the cost of the American army.⁴⁶

Grenville had postponed the America Stamp Act for a year, but another colonial measure his ministry had also intended to defer was suddenly enacted at the end of the session. The problem of depreciated colonial paper money being used to repay to British merchants debts

borrowed in sterling had been considered by the Bute ministry early in 1763, when Virginia, the chief offender, was told to mend its ways. When that colony did nothing, Hillsborough's Board of Trade took the matter into consideration during the winter of 1763–64, and its report on 9 February 1764 denounced the colonial practice of issuing legal-tender paper money as 'founded on fraud and injustice'. The ministry, however, thought it too late in the session to act, but on 4 April MP Anthony Bacon, an American merchant who had suffered from the practice, proposed a Bill to prohibit colonial currency altogether. The Board of Trade, aware of the shock to the colonial economy, thereupon hastily negotiated with colonial agents a compromise whereby only the issue of new legal-tender currency would be prevented, permitting existing notes, which were dated, to continue until their expiry. This concession took the immediate sting out of the measure, and the American Currency Act passed rapidly without opposition.⁴⁷

Grenville had to concern himself with India as well as America, from motives of political advantage and national interest. In the East India Company Sullivan, after his victory at the Company election of 13 April 1763, exacted immediate revenge on Clive by a Directory decision on 27 April to stop payment of his *jagir*. The indignant Clive preferred political to legal action, but his former Newcastle allies were in impotent opposition, and Pitt warned Clive that he would have no chance in Parliament. By the autumn Clive therefore cast aside his old political connections by negotiating with the new ministry of George Grenville, offering the support of his Parliamentary group in return for help over his *jagir*.⁴⁸ Early in December Horace Walpole reported the deal as made. 'The ministry have bought off Lord Clive with a bribe that would frighten the King of France himself: they have given him back his £25,000 a year.'⁴⁹ But Grenville could not deliver his side of the bargain, for Sullivan saw no need to conciliate Clive. News from India, that the Nawab of Bengal was at war with the Company, then fortuitously put Sullivan at Clive's mercy. A special General Court on 12 March 1764 greeted with acclamation the nomination of Clive as Governor and Commander-in-Chief for Bengal, but he refused to accept without confirmation of his *jagir* and the election of a supportive Court of Directors. It was now that Clive's compact with Grenville paid dividends. He enjoyed ministerial assistance in the Company election, with Treasury Secretary Charles Jenkinson pressuring voters instead of stock-splitting.⁵⁰ Lord Holland, the former Henry Fox, and Lord Sandwich were both as active against Sullivan as they had been for him the previous year. The

new Court of Directors, elected on 12 April, had a narrow majority for Clive, and a General Court confirmed his *jagir* for ten years, by 583 votes to 396.⁵¹ Clive then sailed for India in June, and for the next two years Company matters passed from the forefront of the political stage. The Clive party was assisted by the Grenville ministry to another victory over Sullivan at the 1765 election of Directors, and then kept a low profile during the Rockingham ministry, when no Indian issues came to political notice.

Contrary to many expectations Grenville had been in every respect a success as Prime Minister. Charles Townshend acknowledged his triumph in this candid appraisal to Newcastle at the end of the 1763–64 session. ‘As things now stand, the ministry are strong. The minority not in strength or reputation. Lord Bute forced to keep a neutrality at least, and the public grow familiarised to an administration they see so little opposed.’⁵² The Parliamentary opposition, already at a low ebb, was to suffer further blows. William Pitt, who had rarely attended the Commons after the general warrants case, was not to appear there at all in 1765. Deaths and desertions weakened the Newcastle group. His chief prop and confidant Hardwicke had died on 6 March, and on 2 October the more unexpected demise through epilepsy of the Duke of Devonshire at the age of forty-four deprived the party of a respected figure and Newcastle’s probable successor as leader.⁵³ The death of Henry Legge on 23 August cost the Duke his financial expert, and the group’s leadership in the House of Commons was to be further weakened by the gradual desertions of Charles Yorke and Charles Townshend. Both were negotiating with Grenville, and both gave debating support to his ministry in the next session.

Yet all was not doom and gloom for the opposition. This evident loss of experience and ability was partly offset by the zeal of Newcastle’s younger supporters. The opposition club that they had sought to create at the end of 1762 came into existence by January 1764. Its membership included the Newcastle peers and their Commons followers, together with Lord Temple, but not Pitt. It was organised by a Thomas Wildman in Albemarle Street, and according to John Almon, who became its official stationer and bookseller, was called ‘the Coterie’, a designation used also by diarist James Harris in his debate report of 22 March.⁵⁴ Newcastle listed 106 members on 9 February.⁵⁵ Even during the political doldrums of the 1764 summer recess the club met every week. Newcastle was never enthusiastic about this new development, jealously commenting to Portland on 1 July that ‘the boys of Wildmans shall not be the Whig party’.⁵⁶ But the gap

between the 'zealous young men' and the aristocratic grandees was bridged by the thirty-four-year-old Marquess of Rockingham, who, unlike the Duke, regularly dined at Wildman's. This situation paved the way for his accession to the party leadership early in 1765, when Newcastle tacitly and reluctantly began to step down: and Wildman's Club seems to have ended when he became Prime Minister.⁵⁷

This opposition could still hope to find political mileage in such controversies of the previous session as the cider tax and general warrants. In the autumn of 1764 the cider members sought an alliance with the Newcastle party, which considered the prospect of exploiting the West Country discontent, but rejected the idea for several reasons. Pitt, piqued that the first approach had not been made to him, declined all cooperation. 'I have no disposition to quit the free condition of a man standing *single*', he informed Newcastle in October.⁵⁸ Newcastle, too, feared that 'a coalition with the Tories' would give offence to many of his friends, and in any case he rightly deemed the prospect of success uncertain: the cider issue was never to be debated in 1765.⁵⁹

The opposition, by contrast, wasted no time in mounting a challenge on general warrants. On 29 January 1765 Sir William Meredith again moved, as on 17 February 1764, that they were illegal in libel cases. This time the ministerial counter-tactic, immediately deployed by lawyer George Hay, was a destructive amendment to render the motion unacceptable: this was a procedural device hitherto rarely used, and denounced as unfair by the opposition. Hay agreed that general warrants were illegal under common law, but with the caveat that state necessity might justify their use. Pointing out that the matter was pending in the law courts, he put an amendment to that effect, contending that courts decided the law, not Parliamentary resolutions. This tactic was denounced by Henry Conway, an army general now turning politician, who in 1764 had been dismissed from two posts, Groom of the Bedchamber and a colonelcy of dragoons, for speaking and voting against general warrants. His political career was thereby boosted by martyr status, and his personal connections with Cumberland and Grafton took him into the Newcastle party. Two prominent MPs unconnected with the Duke who also criticised the amendment were William Dowdeswell and Lord George Sackville. In a tortuous speech Charles Townshend spoke for administration while at the same time denouncing general warrants as an 'odious, skulking' device of officials. Charles Yorke, for the only time that session, spoke in opposition, again condemning general warrants as illegal. Attorney-General

Norton pointed out that Yorke had argued otherwise in court. This premeditated attack found its mark, for Yorke's weak reply was to distinguish between his legal and political roles, presumably what was and what ought to be the law. A second political martyr who spoke was Colonel Isaac Barré, whose political allegiance Shelburne had now transferred from Bute to Pitt. He complained that of eighteen army officers in the House who had opposed general warrants he alone had been dismissed. That was misleading. His removal from military posts worth £1,500 a year had occurred by December 1763, for opposing ministerial policy on Wilkes before general warrants became the issue. Later Barré poked fun at Grenville. He was glad to see him surrounded by friends, for he remembered when he could have taken them home 'in his chariot'. The House sat until five o'clock the next morning, when the ministerial amendment was carried by 224 votes to 185.⁶⁰

That debate was to contemporaries the highlight of the Parliamentary session, with several new men, Barré, Conway and Dowdeswell, to the fore: but the size of the ministerial majority, compared with that in 1764, was a dousing shock to opposition ardour, and the subsequent American legislation, for which Grenville is so remembered, attracted little controversy. The ministry, however, came to regard the Stamp Act as of great significance, because of the American response to Grenville's announcement. Far from taking up his offer to suggest alternative modes of Parliamentary taxation, the colonies protested against that whole concept.⁶¹ The Grenville ministry perceived the challenge to Parliamentary sovereignty. After a Treasury Board meeting in December 1764 James Harris made this note: 'colonies would reject all taxes of ours, both *internal* and *external* – would be represented'.⁶² By early 1765 the assertion of Parliamentary sovereignty over America had become for the ministry more important than the prospective revenue. That, in the final draft of the Stamp Bill, would be derived from stamp duties on newspapers, most legal documents, cargo lists for ships, and numerous other less recurrent items like liquor licenses, calendars, cards and dice. The chief burden would fall on printers, lawyers, merchants, and publicans. It was expected to yield £100,000, and, even with £50,000 from the molasses duty, American taxes would bring in less than half the £350,000 now estimated as the cost of the American army.⁶³

Parliamentary discussion of the subject began on 6 February, when Grenville introduced the appropriate resolutions after a carefully constructed speech. The colonial claim to be taxed only by their own representative bodies would apply equally to all other legislation, he

said. The colonies were subject to the mother country, and none had been given exemption, by charter or otherwise, from Parliamentary taxation. All taxes were unpopular, like the one on cider, and fairness demanded that everybody should contribute, including the colonists, who were defended by Britain's army and navy. The stamp duties would be efficient and equitably spread, and the colonists had not responded to the invitation to make alternative suggestions. The main criticism came from two Pittites, William Beckford and Isaac Barré, but neither of them or any other speaker challenged Parliament's right of taxation, a point later rubbed in by Charles Townshend, who said that the colonists were well able to pay. Although twelve of the eighteen speakers opposed the taxation, on grounds of inexpediency and impolicy, a blocking motion by Beckford was defeated by 245 votes to 49.⁶⁴ 'Many of our people with them', explained George Onslow to Newcastle.⁶⁵

Discussion of the Stamp Bill resumed on 15 February, over the rejection of several colonial petitions, on the procedural ground that Parliament did not accept protests against future taxation. A notable speech came from Charles Yorke, who defended Parliamentary taxation of America by the argument that the two alternatives would be undesirable or unfair: either a federal Congress of the colonies, or an arbitrary quota system. Subsequent Commons discussions concerned only details, and there was no Lords debate on the measure. No MP or peer had challenged Parliament's right to tax the colonies.⁶⁶

Meanwhile there had arrived from America on 1 March a report from the army commander-in-chief, now General Thomas Gage, complaining about colonial obstruction over billeting soldiers. Secretary at War Welbore Ellis promptly drafted a Bill, approved by Southern Secretary Halifax, authorising where necessary the quartering of soldiers on private houses. It was the alert King who expressed concern about the Parliamentary reception of such a proposal, and at his behest Grenville altered it to a vague phrase stipulating previous practice if not enough barracks or taverns were available.⁶⁷ MPs like William Beckford were not fooled when Ellis presented the American Mutiny Bill to the Commons on 1 April, and there was much talk of liberty and Magna Carta. Afraid of an unexpected Parliamentary storm, with Pitt being roused to support the Newcastle party, the ministry postponed the Bill until 19 April, to provide the opportunity of changing the alternative choice to one of uninhabited buildings. That met all Parliamentary objections, but a consequent additional stipulation that the colonists should provide

at their own expense non-food items such as fuel and bedding was to become a grievance in America.⁶⁸

The concept of ‘a Grenville programme’ for America has little validity. Many of the measures exacted by his ministry arose from decisions taken by the Bute ministry, such as those for colonial taxation and the general nature of the land settlement; while the American Mutiny Act was a belated postscript. But Grenville was a Prime Minister who got things done, a capable and conscientious man, one especially concerned about financial viability and legal authority, who was shocked by the colonial situation. Therein lies the truth of a retrospective comment by an unidentified official. ‘Mr Grenville lost America because he read the American dispatches, which his predecessors had never done.’⁶⁹

The same motivation of tighter imperial control led the Grenville ministry into an important policy decision concerning Ireland. The matter had not been given priority. The ministry, with many other problems calling for attention, sent its new Lord-Lieutenant Northumberland to Ireland with instructions to cooperate with the Undertakers, ‘to temporize with the evil’, as Halifax phrased it on 26 November 1763.⁷⁰ Even so the Parliamentary session of 1763–64 proved a stormy one for Dublin Castle. There was much indignant debate about the granting of Irish posts and pensions to British politicians, even though Northumberland was authorised to announce a government decision not to award any more such pensions.⁷¹ So delicate was the situation that Northumberland advised that it would be unwise to seek approval of the Peace of Paris, pointing out the sensitive position of Speaker Ponsonby, who was closely connected with the Cavendish family, opponents of the peace terms at Westminster. Ministerial pressure caused the Lord-Lieutenant to alter his stance.⁷² The Viceroy was also confronted with Irish repercussions of the *North Briton* case. Support for John Wilkes was voiced in a Dublin newspaper *The Freeman’s Journal*, launched on 10 September 1763 by Charles Lucas, a radical MP elected for Dublin City in 1761 and sometimes dubbed ‘the Irish Wilkes’. Northumberland contrived to secure on 20 December 1763 the passage, by 130 votes to 42, of an Address that both commended the Peace and condemned Wilkes. That was a notable triumph for the Viceroy, who had retained the support of the Ponsonby faction, but the price of this success was surrender to the Undertakers.

When Northumberland returned to England, Stone, Shannon and Ponsonby were left as Lords Justices: and in July 1764 they forced the

resignation of Chief Secretary Hamilton, whose attempt to create an embryonic 'Castle Party' was a potential threat to their power. He was replaced by Lord Drogheda, an ally of Stone and, contrary to recent practice, both an Irishman and a peer: Dublin Castle would not have an official spokesman in the Commons.⁷³ The Grenville ministry was then fortuitously presented with an opportunity to redress this situation, when Stone died on 19 December and Shannon the next day. The power vacuum was more apparent than real. The new Lord Shannon was the son-in-law of John Ponsonby, and inherited his father's electoral and Parliamentary influence. His close alliance with the Speaker continued a powerful Undertaker interest, but the demise of Archbishop Stone was an opportunity too good to miss. George III later recalled that 'on the death of the Primate of Ireland it was deemed expedient to re-examine the state of Ireland'.⁷⁴ The cabinet that met on 1 February 1765 to consider Ireland included Northumberland and his two immediate predecessors, Bedford and Halifax. After Northumberland expressed doubts as to whether his health would permit him to return to Ireland, the cabinet came to this resolution. 'That whenever a new Lord Lieutenant should be appointed by His Majesty he should be directed to reside constantly.'⁷⁵

Such a tightening of control over Ireland would chime in with Grenville's American policy, and form a stronger pattern of imperial government. Contemporaries noted the parallel, for early in 1765 there were rumours in Ireland that the British Parliament intended to tax that country as well as America.⁷⁶ Subsequent events were to demonstrate that the logical implication of the decision, the creation of a Castle Party in the Dublin Parliament, had not been fully grasped; but, in any case, the Grenville ministry did not have the opportunity to implement its Irish policy. Their intention to replace Northumberland, with his Bute connection, by the Bedfordite Weymouth met with stiff resistance from the King, who deemed the choice unsuitable on grounds of character and competence. Weymouth was not appointed until 5 June, and the dismissal of the Grenville ministry the next month meant that he never went to Ireland.

During the Grenville ministry, as later, political and imperial matters took precedence over foreign policy.⁷⁷ That was initially left to Sandwich, Northern Secretary from September 1763. Southern Secretary Halifax was more concerned with his responsibility for the colonies, while the priority for Grenville was the ramifications of the *North Briton* case. Although there seemed after the Peace of Paris to be a prospect of European tranquility for the first time in several

decades, Sandwich acted on the assumption of French hostility universal among British politicians, and continued the quest for a Russian alliance that would last, intermittently, for a decade. He soon found that Russia was not content to renew the 1742 and 1755 treaties by which she had simply agreed to hire soldiers to Britain. Catherine II now insisted on equality, specifying particularly what came to be known as ‘the Turkish clause’, British assistance if the Ottoman Empire attacked Russia. That stipulation was made in a draft alliance proposal presented to British ambassador Lord Buckinghamshire in August 1763; and a secret clause also requested British financial support in the anticipated forthcoming election of a Polish King. These terms were unanimously rejected by the Grenville cabinet on 16 September.⁷⁸ The idea that Britain should have to pay a peacetime subsidy to obtain an ally was deemed insulting, while the financially prudent Grenville jibbed at the expense. Fear of a threat to Britain’s trade in the Mediterranean from Turkish hostility was a further consideration.

The death of King Augustus III of Poland on 5 October then caused Russia to offer more favourable terms. Russian minister Nikita Panin dropped the Turkish stipulation, and asked only for a £100,000 subsidy for use in Poland. This was a window of opportunity for a cheap Russian alliance, but the British government still balked at a peacetime subsidy, and the chance was lost. Frederick II of Prussia signed a treaty with Russia in April 1764, and his assistance enabled Catherine II to secure the election of her candidate Stanislaus Poniatowski in September 1764. Panin, aware of the benefits of British financial and naval strength, always favoured a ‘Northern System’ in which Britain would be an ally as well as Prussia, but Frederick II’s enmity and the Turkish clause were henceforth invariably to be obstacles. In 1764 the inept Lord Buckinghamshire was replaced by the able and energetic Sir George Macartney, just when Britain and Russia were finding common ground against France in Sweden. That country had been the scene of party strife since a 1720 constitution restricted royal power. Britain and Russia supported the Caps party against the hitherto dominant Hats, backed by Choiseul. A key figure in Stockholm was the British envoy Sir John Goodricke, as both Britain and Russia spent money in the 1765 elections to the Swedish Diet that led to a Caps victory.

Such a success, in which Russia allowed Britain to take the leading role, cannot disguise a British inability to read the European scene correctly. The most serious misunderstanding was the outmoded belief that, as Sandwich commented to Grenville on 6 June 1764,

Britain and France were still ‘the two great Powers of Europe’.⁷⁹ This lack of perception was underlined by an abortive approach to Austria, as Sandwich’s strong desire to revive ‘the old System’ clouded his judgement. Even Austrian Chancellor Kaunitz’s categorical statement in January 1764 to the British ambassador that Austria would adhere to her French alliance was not seen as a final rebuff, merely as a postponement of hopes cherished by many in Britain.

Unrealistic as the main thrust of British foreign policy may have been, under Grenville it was nevertheless a success. Quite apart from the 1765 coup in Sweden, which was to prove short-lived in the face of French countermeasures, the Premier himself, continuing his hard-line attitude already evident during the Bute ministry, resorted to what in the next century came to be known as ‘gunboat diplomacy’. Still resentful about the leniency of the Peace of Paris, Grenville took a firmer line than his colleagues, the pacifist and Francophile Bedford, the lethargic Halifax, and a Sandwich mistakenly anxious about the navy, when in 1764 and 1765 confrontations occurred with the Bourbon Powers. The status of the British settlements in Honduras to cut logwood, which yielded a dye for wool, had been confirmed in 1763, but the Spanish harassment of them in 1764 was not unjustified, for they were both illegally cutting mahogany for furniture and engaging in contraband trade. News of this situation was overshadowed when a local French governor expelled British subjects from Turk’s Island, south of the Bahamas, on 1 June 1764. At Grenville’s instigation Britain put together a naval task force, including four ships of the line, designed to overcome any local opposition and to deter any prospect of a major conflict. Spain and France promptly conceded the points in dispute, respectively promising not to molest the Honduras settlements and disavowing the Turk’s Island action, with the French government professing ignorance of its location! Likewise, early in 1765 the threat of a naval attack on a new French settlement on the Gambia River in West Africa, an area not mentioned in the peace settlement but assumed in London to be a British preserve, caused its immediate evacuation. This naval coercion by Britain of her Bourbon foes set the tone for the decade, since Choiseul was all too aware of Britain’s superiority at sea.⁸⁰

By the Easter of 1765 the Grenville administration appeared to be a success in every respect. Ministers could congratulate themselves on a quiet and productive Parliamentary session, and Grenville seemed to be settling in for a long spell as Premier. ‘Mr Grenville establishes himself upon very solid foundations every day, and gains credit both by his

Parliamentary abilities, and by the improvements he is gradually making in the revenue', courtier Hans Stanley wrote on 24 February.⁸¹ A 1763 prophecy that Grenville would be Prime Minister as long as Sir Robert Walpole did not now seem foolish.⁸² He was dominant in the cabinet as well as the House of Commons. His colleagues, after some early disputes over patronage and policy, had soon displayed an unexpected harmony, with Grenville their acknowledged head.⁸³ But the third centre of power, the Crown, had not been secured, despite George III's initial assurances to Grenville. Both men later dated the deterioration of their relationship to the autumn of 1764, although earlier the King had already looked askance at the growing cabinet solidarity, for two reasons: it weakened his own bond with Grenville; and he held a low opinion of most of his ministers. Halifax he thought lazy and incompetent, while the Bedfords were self-seeking, apart from the Duke himself, who was merely idle.⁸⁴ The heart of the matter was George III's growing personal dislike of the boringly verbose Grenville. 'When he has wearied me for two hours', the King complained to Bute, 'he looks at his watch to see if he may not tire me for an hour more.'⁸⁵ Patronage was the issue, not policy. George III, in political memoranda he compiled at the end of 1765, made frequent references to the 'insolence' of Grenville in his demands. 'No office fell vacant in any department that Mr G. did not declare he would not serve if the man he recommended did not succeed.'⁸⁶

It was the Bute phenomenon again. During the winter of 1763 to 1764 Bute had absented himself from London, and as late as June 1764 Grenville confided to James Harris that 'he was perfectly well with Lord Bute', at whose request he had accepted the Admiralty and the Treasury, whereas he could never ally with 'the Newcastle Party', because they wanted 'a sole possession of all power'.⁸⁷ But thereafter Bute's personal contact with the King led to Grenville's belief that his patronage recommendations were constantly being refused in favour of Bute nominations. It was an opinion widely held. Lord Chesterfield wrote on 14 September that Bute 'names absolutely to every employment, civil, military, and ecclesiastical'.⁸⁸ Especially was there an ongoing dispute over Scottish patronage between Grenville and Bute's brother Stuart Mackenzie, Lord Privy Seal of Scotland. Grenville's attitude to Bute soon changed from trust to hostility. Whereas earlier he had attempted to curb Bedfordite animosity to Bute, he now shared their hostility. This antipathy became mutual, with Bute men uncooperative, absent from meetings, and conspicuously silent in the Parliamentary debates of 1765.⁸⁹ On 18 April 1765

Horace Walpole could write that 'the enmity between Lord Bute and Mr Grenville is not denied on either side.'⁹⁰

Suspicion of Bute naturally coloured Grenville's reaction when on 3 April George III, intermittently ill since January, informed him that he wanted a Regency Bill to cover the contingency of his death. For when the King reserved to himself the nomination of regent, Grenville's mind immediately flew to the Princess Dowager of Wales, and the fear that Bute would thereby become regent by proxy. But George III always had the Queen in mind, and kept this decision secret only to preserve harmony in the royal family. Ill health precluded his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, and he had no intention of choosing his frivolous brother Edward, Duke of York, but wished to avoid a public snub to him as long as possible. Grenville and his colleagues were barking up the wrong tree when they pressed George III to reveal his choice. When the possibility of the King's mother being considered for this role was raised in the House of Lords by opposition peer Richmond, Halifax was instructed to move on 3 May a relevant definition of the royal family as the Queen and descendants of George II. No one thought it a point of consequence until the Princess Dowager was now persuaded she had been insulted. Grenville declined to move a Commons resolution that would contradict his colleague, but supported one by a minor government lawyer John Morton on 9 May to insert her name. Grenville himself, reflecting on the incident three years later, did not believe the episode contributed to his subsequent dismissal from office, but many thought so then and afterwards.⁹¹

George III had indeed already decided to change his ministry, but postponed any move until the Regency Bill had passed through Parliament on 13 May: though Grenville thought the 'decisive' event was a riot of Spitalfields silk weavers after Bedford contrived the rejection of a protective Silk Bill in the House of Lords that same day.⁹² Bute was not this time the King's negotiator, for George III had ceased having private discussions with his former favourite in March: Holland was incredulous when Bute told him so on 7 November. 'I thought with the whole world, that you saw the King in private, at Leicester House, and at Kew 3 or 4 times in a week'.⁹³ But long afterwards it remained a Grenvillite belief that Bute caused the downfall of the ministry.⁹⁴ The King was now on good terms again with the Duke of Cumberland, and in April sounded his uncle on acting as an intermediary to replace the ministry with the opposition, a request with which the Duke willingly complied.⁹⁵ Since 1762 his political associations had been with the Newcastle Whigs, and he had always resented

Bute having supplanted him in the natural role of his nephew's adviser. On 13 May the King authorised Cumberland to form a ministry out of 'Mr Pitt and Lord Temple, with the other great Whig families'.⁹⁶ But Pitt declined to discuss any ministerial plans, and the Newcastle group refused to take office without him.

This fiasco played into Grenville's hands, for the attempt was soon public knowledge, as the Premier told the King on 21 May. Next day the cabinet now set out its terms for continuing in office.⁹⁷ The first were Bute's complete withdrawal from politics, and his brother's dismissal from his Scottish post. Nor must Cumberland have anything more to do with the government. Weymouth was to become Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, in succession to Lord Northumberland, and Charles Townshend would replace Lord Holland at the Pay Office: both changes were deemed further blows at Bute, since Northumberland's son had just married one of his daughters, and Holland was thought now a Bute man. The King resisted only the dismissal of Mackenzie, having promised him the post for life, but yielded on 23 May. His colleagues pushed Grenville into this demand, which he perceived in retrospect as the last straw for the King: 'the consequences are known', he observed to James Harris when recalling the incident in 1768.⁹⁸ The public rebuff to Bute made the ministry widely popular in the political world, notably at the Cocoa Tree, and Grenville's levee on 23 May was crowded.⁹⁹

The Grenville cabinet thought this episode of May 1765 a repetition of the events of August 1763, and that another royal failure to remove the ministry left it in a stronger position than before. This confidence was strengthened by the sudden reconciliation, political as well as personal, of Lord Temple with his brother, Premier George Grenville, by 22 May.¹⁰⁰ Since Pitt always made it a condition of his return to office that Temple should accompany him, and the Newcastle group seemed unwilling to act without Pitt, this event may have explained Pitt's refusal, and now appeared to rule out any immediate prospect of a change of administration.¹⁰¹

That was an illusion. Whereas in 1763 George III had given genuine support to Grenville, in 1765 the King was alienated from his ministry, which indeed made little attempt to conciliate him. At the end of May George III complained to Bute that 'every day I meet with some insult from these people'.¹⁰² James Harris observed with concern the coldness Grenville met with at a royal levee on 4 June. 'These and many other little events show that the *present* system of power, however strong in its constituent parts, is founded on *compulsion*.'¹⁰³

Matters came to a head when Bedford, without consulting Grenville, sought to clear the air by confronting the King on 12 June, reporting to the Duke of Marlborough what he had said. 'I proceeded to beseech him to permit his authority and his favours and countenance to go together; and if the last can't be given to his present ministers, to transfer to others that authority.'¹⁰⁴ This interview strengthened the indignant King's intention, already mentioned to Cumberland, to change the ministry, and he promptly gave the Duke appropriate instructions. If Pitt again refused, an approach should be made to 'those worthy men, Lord Rockingham, the Dukes of Grafton, Newcastle and others; for they are men who have principles and therefore cannot approve of seeing the Crown dictated to by low men'.¹⁰⁵ For George III, as later in his reign, paid no heed to a Parliamentary majority if he wished to overturn an administration, and, contrary to ministerial opinion, he did have somewhere else to turn. 'The Duke of Cumberland has certainly removed all the prejudices to the Whigs', reflected Newcastle to Rockingham on 1 June.¹⁰⁶ The King was appealing to the very same Whig aristocracy whose removal from power he had intended at his accession.

The next few weeks were recalled by the second Lord Hardwicke as the time when 'the Duke of Cumberland was settling a ministry for the King'.¹⁰⁷ The approach to Pitt foundered on Temple's unwillingness to replace his brother at the Treasury.¹⁰⁸ Cumberland then opened negotiations with the Newcastle connection, to the incredulity of men like Lord Chancellor Northington, the former Lord Henley, who on 26 June 'talked with contempt of a ministry to be formed by that old fellow ... and a parcel of boys'.¹⁰⁹ Newcastle, now seventy-two, was devoid of ambition for high office, but favoured the attempt to form a ministry without Pitt, from a sense of duty to his sovereign, and also to redress the treatment of his supporters in 1762. On 30 June Newcastle, Rockingham and General Henry Conway visited Cumberland at Windsor, and there agreed that Rockingham, aged thirty-five and Cumberland's choice, should take the Treasury, while the two Secretaries of State would be the Duke of Grafton, not thirty until September, and either Conway or Charles Townshend. Construction of the ministry was hampered by Pitt's refusal to promise support, and bedevilled by suspicion of Bute. Rumour had it that when Pitt was consulted about policy he talked of general warrants, repeal of the cider tax, and a Prussian alliance, but would give no assurances.¹¹⁰ Attempts to secure his goodwill included a peerage for Judge Pratt as Lord Camden, given, said Temple when he later claimed credit for the

creation, for Pratt's behaviour towards Wilkes in 1763;¹¹¹ an unsuccessful offer of the Board of Trade to Lord Shelburne; and acceptance of Grafton's insistence that he would become Northern Secretary only if Pitt could take over the post, and presumably head the ministry, whenever he chose.¹¹²

If the prospective neutrality of Pitt seemed to jeopardise the ministry's survival, fear of Bute's influence was exaggerated. It was reflected in an early stipulation, suggested by the Duke of Portland, that Bute's brother Stuart Mackenzie should not be restored to his Scottish post, and in a demand for the dismissal from office of some men deemed Buteites. George III was astonished by these demands, for Cumberland's role ought to have made it apparent that Bute no longer had the King's ear: but he authorised his uncle to give assurances that Bute would not be allowed to interfere in political matters and that any of Bute's followers who did not support the proposed administration would face immediate dismissal. That the incoming ministry had grounds for such unease was demonstrated by an approach to Grenville on 3 July by three men associated with Bute, Lords Denbigh, Egmont and Talbot. They suggested that he should seek a reconciliation with the King, but the Prime Minister replied that such a move would be 'impossible and absurd' while negotiations to replace him were in progress.¹¹³ This omen that the Rockingham administration would not enjoy the full support of the Court Party was to be borne out by the future course of events.

Another courtier, Lord Townshend, the former General George Townshend who had succeeded his father in 1764, was unwilling, so he told George III, to act against 'men whose principles he had always approved', the outgoing Grenville ministry; he persuaded his younger brother Charles to decline the Secretaryship of State, and was rumoured to have himself refused the Lord Lieutenantcy of Ireland and a Marquessate.¹¹⁴ Even when pressed by George III Charles Townshend refused to become either Secretary of State or Chancellor of the Exchequer, and remained at the Pay Office recently given him by Grenville. If the attitude of the Townshends was ambivalent, that of the Yorke family was long a part of the old Whig corps, was merely cautious. Charles Yorke delayed acceptance of his old post of Attorney-General, which he eventually took only after a personal promise from George III that the next year he would be made Lord Chancellor.¹¹⁵ His brother, the second Earl of Hardwicke, refused to head the Board of Trade. Lack of confidence in the prospects of the new ministry rendered recruitment to it difficult, but the key posts

were soon filled. Conway became Southern Secretary, the Board of Trade went to Lord Dartmouth, a nephew of Henry Legge, and the Exchequer to William Dowdeswell, a surprise choice, since the only link that old Tory had with the old Whigs was resistance to the cider tax. Continued from the former ministry were Lord Chancellor Northington and First Lord of the Admiralty Egmont, both men loyal to the King rather than to their new colleagues. Newcastle became Lord Privy Seal, and Rockingham's uncle, old Lord Winchelsea, Lord President of the Council. Contemporary opinion identified two key weaknesses in the new ministry, lack of both administrative experience and Parliamentary debating strength. Neither Secretary of State had held executive office, nor any members of the Treasury Board, where Rockingham and Dowdeswell were joined by three young MPs hitherto with an aptitude only for opposition speeches, George Onslow, Thomas Townshend, and Lord John Cavendish. In the House of Lords the Bedford group alone might prove more than a match for ministers, and it was not expected that Conway and Dowdeswell would fare well against Grenville in the Commons.¹¹⁶

The formal change of ministry took place on 10 July, when Grenville and his chief colleagues were summoned by George III. 'The King's reception of him and the two disgraced Secretaries was cold and short', so James Harris was told. When Grenville, conscious no doubt of having been a successful Premier, asked why they were being dismissed, 'the King admitted his business had been well done, but that they had formed a plan to give him law'.¹¹⁷

When Grenville dined his former Treasury Board on 17 July, he stated that he would cooperate with the new ministry if his measures were adopted, and oppose if contrary ones were put forward.¹¹⁸ That was political correctness at a time when good reasons had to be adduced for opposition to the King's government not to be denounced as factious. But Grenville's opposition was already the probable outcome. For Dowdeswell was expected to repeal the cider tax, and by the end of July it was being rumoured that the ministry would 'affect popularity by concessions to the Americans'.¹¹⁹

Notes

- 1 *Chatham Papers*, II, 217–18.
- 2 BL Add. MSS. 32948, fos 120–2.
- 3 BL Add. MSS. 32948, fos 54–7.
- 4 *Bute Letters*, pp. 212–34.

- 5 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 10–12. Lawson, *George Grenville*, p. 158.
- 6 *Grenville Papers*, II, 191. Mrs Grenville's Diary.
- 7 *Chesterfield Letters*, VI, 2,531.
- 8 *Grenville Papers*, II, 83–5.
- 9 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B975. Fitzmaurice, *Shelburne*, I, 199–204.
- 10 *Grenville Papers*, II, 193–9. Mrs Grenville's Diary.
- 11 *Grenville Papers*, II, 200–1. Mrs Grenville's Diary.
- 12 *Grenville Papers*, II, 104–7, 203.
- 13 *Jenkinson Papers*, p. 394. Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 61–3.
- 14 BL Add. MSS. 38335, fos 120–34; 38338, fos 274–81.
- 15 *Chesterfield Letters*, VI, 2,543.
- 16 Tomlinson, Thesis, p. 110.
- 17 *Chesterfield Letters*, VI, 2,543.
- 18 BL Add. MSS. 51406, fos 120–1.
- 19 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B89.
- 20 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B97–9.
- 21 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 27–36.
- 22 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 17 Feb. 1764.
- 23 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 37–9, 42.
- 24 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 41–5.
- 25 *St James's Chronicle*, 8 Dec. 1763.
- 26 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 45–7.
- 27 Namier, *Structure of Politics*, p. 153.
- 28 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 47–54.
- 29 BL Add. MSS. 38337, fo. 193.
- 30 Tomlinson, Thesis, p. 101.
- 31 Thomas, *John Wilkes*, pp. 54–5.
- 32 Woodland, *PH*, 4 (1985), 115–36.
- 33 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B108.
- 34 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 14 Nov. 1763. *Corr. of George III*, I, 63.
- 35 Tomlinson, Thesis, p. 83.
- 36 *Chatham Papers*, II, 282.
- 37 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 24 Jan. 1764. Walpole, *Memoirs*, I, 281.
- 38 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 31 Jan. 1764.
- 39 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 6, 7, 10 Feb. 1764. Walpole, *Memoirs*, I, 285.
- 40 *Additional Grenville Papers*, pp. 317–18.
- 41 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 40–3.
- 42 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B708.

- 43 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 69–77.
- 44 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B996.
- 45 BL Add. MSS. 32957, fos 239–40.
- 46 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 56–61.
- 47 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 62–6.
- 48 *Grenville Papers*, II, 160–1.
- 49 Walpole, *Letters*, V, 403.
- 50 *Jenkinson Papers*, pp. 270–2.
- 51 Sutherland, *East India Company*, pp. 117–32. For the *jagir* issue see Lenman and Lawson, *HJ*, 26 (1983), 801–29. The *jagir* was extended in 1767 to 1784, but Clive died in 1774.
- 52 *Lyttelton Memoirs*, II, 659.
- 53 *Chesterfield Letters*, VI, 2,613.
- 54 Almon, *Memoirs*, p. 16. Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 22 Mar. 1764.
- 55 BL Add. MSS. 32955, fos 409–14.
- 56 BL Add. MSS. 32967, fo. 187.
- 57 Watson, *BIHR*, 44 (1971), 59–77.
- 58 *Chatham Papers*, II, 293–7. Walpole, *Memoirs*, II, 28–9.
- 59 Woodland, *PH*, 8 (1989), 78–9.
- 60 Malmesbury MSS. Harris Diary, 29 Jan. 1765. For the debate see also *Ryder Diary*, pp. 239–53, and Walpole, *Memoirs*, II, 37–45.
- 61 Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 51–8.
- 62 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies A56.
- 63 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies A57. For more detail see Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 77–88.
- 64 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 89–94.
- 65 BL Add. MSS. 32965, fo. 346.
- 66 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 96–9.
- 67 *Grenville Papers*, III, 11–14.
- 68 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 102–8.
- 69 *Rockingham Memoirs*, I, 249.
- 70 *CHOP*, I, 330.
- 71 *Grenville Papers*, II, 147. *Additional Grenville Papers*, pp. 56–7, 65–6.
- 72 *CHOP*, I, 314, 317, 337–8. *Additional Grenville Papers*, p. 66.
- 73 Powell, Thesis, pp. 95–100. *HMC Charlemont*, I, 22.
- 74 *Corr. of George III*, I, 168.
- 75 *Additional Grenville Papers*, pp. 335–6.
- 76 Powell, Thesis, pp. 106–7.
- 77 On this see Scott, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 53–89.
- 78 *Additional Grenville Papers*, pp. 317–18.
- 79 *Grenville Papers*, II, 344.

- 80 Tracy, *Navies*, pp. 42–53.
- 81 BL Add. MSS. 22359, fo. 44, quoted Langford, *First Rockingham Administration*, p. 7.
- 82 Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 124–5.
- 83 Walpole, *Memoirs*, I, 234.
- 84 Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 151–6.
- 85 Walpole, *Memoirs*, II, 115.
- 86 *Corr. of George III*, I, 162–75.
- 87 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies A51.
- 88 *Chesterfield Letters*, VI, 2,613–4.
- 89 Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 156–64.
- 90 Walpole, *Letters*, VI, 215.
- 91 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B608–12, 685. For accounts of this episode see Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 165–90; Jarrett, *EHR*, 85 (1970), 282–315; and Brooke, *King George III*, pp. 110–13.
- 92 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B618–9.
- 93 BL Add. MSS. 51379, fos 175–6.
- 94 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies A70.
- 95 BL Add. MSS. 51406, fo. 114.
- 97 *Rockingham Memoirs*, I, 191. Cumberland's narrative.
- 97 *Grenville Papers*, III, 41.
- 98 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B882.
- 99 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B615, 886–7. *Grenville Papers*, III, 177–88. Tomlinson, Thesis, pp. 180–6.
- 100 *Grenville Papers*, III, 183.
- 101 Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 118–19.
- 102 *Bute Letters*, p. 241.
- 103 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B630–1.
- 104 *Bedford Papers*, III, 286–90.
- 105 *Corr. of George III*, I, 116–19. These letters are printed in the wrong sequence.
- 106 BL Add. MSS. 32967, fos 3–5.
- 107 BL Add. MSS. 35428, fo. 22.
- 108 One rumour was that the plan was undermined by Grenville's refusal to be merely Chancellor of the Exchequer, as the key to the whole arrangement. Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B640–4.
- 109 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B646.
- 110 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B650.
- 111 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B913.
- 112 BL Add. MSS. 32973, fos 68–71.
- 113 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B652.

- 114 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B661, 670.
- 115 BL Add. MSS. 35428, fo. 22.
- 116 For the construction of the new ministry see Hardy, Thesis, pp. 307–64; Langford, *First Rockingham Administration*, pp. 4–39; and Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, pp. 119–26.
- 117 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B662–8, 887–8.
- 118 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B669.
- 119 Malmesbury MSS. Photocopies B671.