

Massachusetts Government Act

Following the Boston Tea Party, the citizens of Massachusetts continued to assert their independence of royal control. After the Massachusetts legislature appointed a committee of correspondence, Governor Hutchinson challenged their right to make such appointments. In reply, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and others drafted a reply, which read in part:

Your excellency is pleased to inform the two houses that you are required to signify to them His Majesty's disapprobation of the appointment of committees of correspondence, in various instances, which sit and act during the recess of the General Court by prorogation. You are not pleased to explain to us the grounds and reasons of His Majesty's disapprobation; until we shall have such explanation laid before us, a full answer to this part of your speech will not be expected from us. We cannot, however, omit saying upon this occasion that while the common rights of the American subjects continue to be attacked in various instances, and at times when the several assemblies are not sitting, it is highly necessary that they should correspond with each other in order to unite in the most effectual means for the obtaining a redress of their grievances.

Increasingly, the view from Britain was the Massachusetts represented the epicenter of resistance to royal control. Lord Dartmouth, secretary of state for the colonies, wrote to Governor Gage (who had succeeded Hutchinson) in April, setting out the challenge:

His Majesty trusts that no opposition will, or can, with any effect, be made to the carrying the law into execution, nor any violence or insult offered to those to whom the execution of it is entrusted. Should it happen otherwise, your authority as the first Magistrate, combined with the command over the King's troops, will, it is hoped, enable you to meet every opposition, and fully to preserve the public peace, by employing those troops with effect, should the madness of the people, on the one hand, or the timidity or want of strength of the peace officers on the other hand, make it necessary to have recourse to their assistance.

By May, Parliament had had enough, and passed the Coercive Acts. The Massachusetts Government Act, passed on May 20, 1774, effectively abrogated the colony's charter and provided for an unprecedented amount of royal control. Severe limits were placed on the powers of town meetings, the essential ingredient of American self-government. Further, most elective offices in the colony were to be filled with royal appointees, not with popularly elected officials.