Liberal thinkers supported American patriots

By Anthony Pappas

In the late 1760's and early 1770's, many liberal thinkers in Great Britain sympathized with the American colonies in their attempts to procure a greater degree of freedom from the British Crown. Yet their influence on future events was slight. In a lecture in the Kregge Little Theater, Prof. J. H. Plumb, of Cambridge University, described the various factors which shaped British attitudes toward the American Revolution.

Plumb pointed out a curious phenomenon in both nations was en-tailed between British radicals and colonial patriots. The belief that the American colonies could strike a blow for freedom by removing the imperial yoke.

Prof. Plumb, as such, they wanted a social revolution in England which would change the structure of society. They regarded the contemporary political system, with its attendant corruption and patronage as an obstacle to business activity.

However, lacking any sort of organization or leadership, the pro-American forces proved to be impotent once the rebellion was transformed into a war. The British radicals could not reconcile their patriotism with support for the American cause.

In America, radical sentiment exploited national feeling and the radicals replaced many of the conservative New England merchants and Southern planters. In England, however, the conservative element utilized the war as an associate advocacy of liberal ideas with a touch of patriotism.

Prof. Plumb pointed out a curious fact in connection with the downfall of Lord North's cabinet and the ending of the war: This event was brought about by the same conservative groups which had opposed the British radicals. For more than one hundred years the radical element had not supported the government. Finally, however, they rebelled, for they were disgusted with the war's progress and the burden of high taxes which it imposed. Their self-interest eventually caused them to vote against the government.

One result of the American Revolution, according to Plumb, was the reshuffling of Britain to its feudal past. Indeed, demanding political and social equality became satiety during the Napoleonic Wars. The possession of empire and the pursuit of commercial aspirations also tied England to antiquated institutions and strengthened the conservative forces.

In Britain there was no genuine social revolution, and it took longer for the British to establish modern frameworks of political and social representation.

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