**THE INTOLERABLE ACTS**

A direct affront to British authority, the "Boston Tea Party" forced Parliament to take action against the colonies. In retribution for this affront to royal authority, the Prime Minister, Lord North, began passing a series of five laws, dubbed the Coercive or Intolerable Acts, the following spring to punish the Americans.

Prime Minister Lord North defended the program in the House of Commons, saying:

*The Americans have tarred and feathered your subjects, plundered your merchants, burnt your ships, denied all obedience to your laws and authority; yet so clement and so long forbearing has our conduct been that it is incumbent on us now to take a different course. Whatever may be the consequences, we must risk something; if we do not, all is over*

**1. The Boston Port Act:**

Passed on March 30, 1774, the Boston Port Act was a direct action against the city for the previous November's tea party. The legislation dictated that the port of Boston was closed to all shipping until full restitution was made to the East India Company and the King for the lost tea and taxes. Loudly protesting, many Bostonians argued that the act punished the entire city rather than the few who were responsible for the tea party. As supplies in the city dwindled, other colonies began sending relief to the blockaded city.

**2. Massachusetts Government Act:**

Enacted on May 20, 1774, the Massachusetts Government Act was designed to increase royal control over the colony's administration. Abrogating the colony's charter, the act stipulated that its executive council would no longer be democratically elected and its members would instead be appointed by the king. Also, many colonial offices that were previously elected officials would henceforth be appointed by the royal governor. Across the colony, only one town meeting was permitted a year unless approved by the governor.

**3. Administration of Justice Act:**

Passed the same day as the previous act, the Administration of Justice Act stated that royal officials could request a change of venue to another colony or Great Britain if charged with criminal acts in fulfilling their duties. While the act allowed travel expenses to be paid to witnesses, few colonists could afford to leave work to testify at a trial. Many in the colonies felt it was unnecessary as British soldiers had received a fair trial after the Boston Massacre. Dubbed the "Murder Act" by some, it was felt that it allowed royal officials to act with impunity and then escape justice.

**4. Quartering Act**:

A revision of the 1765 Quartering Act, which was largely ignored by colonial assemblies, the 1774 Quartering Act expanded the types of buildings in which soldiers could be housed and removed the requirement that they be provided with provisions. Contrary to popular belief, it did not permit the housing of soldiers in private homes. Typically, soldiers were first to be placed in existing barracks and public houses, but thereafter could be housed in inns, empty building, barns, and other unoccupied structures.

**5. Quebec Act:**

Though it did not have a direct effect on the thirteen colonies, the Quebec Act was considered part of the Intolerable Acts by the American colonists. Intended to ensure the loyalty of the king's Canadian subjects, the act greatly enlarged Quebec's borders and allowed the free practice of the Catholic faith. Among the land transferred to Quebec was much of the Ohio Country, which had been promised to several colonies through their charters and to which many had already laid claim. In addition to angered land speculators, others were fearful about the spread of Catholicism in American.

Reaction to the Intolerable Acts

In passing the acts, Lord North had hoped to detach and isolate the radical element in Massachusetts from the rest of the colonies while also asserting the power of Parliament over the colonial assemblies. The harshness of the acts worked to prevent this outcome as many in the colonies rallied to Massachusetts’s aid. Seeing their charters and rights under threat, colonial leaders formed committees of correspondence to discuss the repercussions of the Intolerable Acts.

Many colonists saw the Coercive Acts (Intolerable Acts) as a violation of their constitutional rights, their natural rights, and their colonial charters. They therefore viewed the acts as a threat to the liberties of all of British America, not just Massachusetts. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, for example, described the acts as "*a most wicked System for destroying the liberty of America."*

The citizens of Boston not only viewed this as an act of unnecessary and cruel punishment, but the Coercive Acts drew the revolting hate against Britain even further. As a result of the Coercive Acts, even more colonists wanted to join against Britain.

Great Britain hoped that the Coercive Acts would isolate radicals in Massachusetts and cause American colonists to concede the authority of Parliament over their elected assemblies. It was a calculated risk that backfired, the acts promoted sympathy for Massachusetts and encouraged colonists from the otherwise diverse colonies to form the First Continental Congress.

The Continental Congress created the Continental Association, an agreement to boycott British goods and, if that did not get the Coercive Acts reversed after a year, to stop exporting goods to Great Britain as well. The Congress also pledged to support Massachusetts in case of attack, which meant that all of the colonies would become involved when the American Revolutionary War began at Lexington and Concord.

North's legislation worked to pull the colonies together and pushed them down the road towards war.