

## Chapter V

### *Multi-Class Outbreaks*

WITHIN THE CLASS-STRATIFIED colonial society, as has been demonstrated, each of the classes conducted its own individual struggles—or campaigns of repression—with only occasional combining of forces, as when indentured servants and slaves battled together, or the poor of the cities and farms gave each other assistance. But the fact is that all these cases—of slaves and indentured servants, of debtor farmers and patroon-bound peasants, of laborers, artisans, and mechanics—represented basically separate and distinct efforts.

In addition, throughout the colonial era, the antagonisms and contradictions of the social order manifested themselves in uprisings and rebellions that were multi-class in nature, with certain merchants and planters leading other classes—mechanics, urban petty-bourgeoisie, debtor farmers, indentured servants, and (rarely) slaves—in more or less combined array against officials representing either the Proprietors or the Crown directly. These outbreaks were high points in a social unrest that more commonly manifested itself in the expression of ideas, the advancing of proposals, the development of political platforms, and the crystallizing of oppositional groups. All these, in turn, were products of the fundamental and growing divergences between the English rulers and the American colonists.

It is a striking fact that multi-class outbreaks were concentrated almost entirely in the 17th century, and were rare in the next one until the grand and successful explosion known as *the*



American Revolution. In the earlier century the marked instability in English politics—with its two revolutions—had a major impact in promoting or encouraging similar events on a smaller scale in the colonies.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the general rawness of English colonial administration in that first century of its existence induced frequent resort to violence by the colonists. In the 17th century, also, there were very much fewer legitimate political and legislative means open to the colonists for the expression and the working out of their grievances than there were to be, especially for the more affluent amongst them, a century later and this made the earlier time a more violent one in its general political nature.

We turn now to a brief chronicle of the more important general uprisings marking the colonial epoch.

## I

One of the earliest, back in 1635 in Virginia (when the colony did not have over 7,000 inhabitants), is of consequence because it demonstrates a dominant strand in all these conflicts, namely, a tendency on the part of the colonial legislature to curb the authority of Royal (or Proprietary) governors and to enhance its own. The details of this event are too complex to require full elucidation in this work: The point is that a lucrative trading post set up in Kent Island, between Maryland and Virginia, by one William Claiborne and his associates, became an object of acrimonious debate between the authorities of the two colonies. Claiborne, backed by the Virginia House of Burgesses (in which actually sat a representative from Kent Island), refused to honor the Maryland Proprietor's demand that he trade from the Island only with a license granted by that Proprietor. Virginia's Governor, John Harvey, sided with the Proprietor, removed Claiborne from his office as Secretary of Virginia and jailed another official who sympathized with Claiborne. This sparked a revolt, led by a former indentured servant, Samuel Mathews

(elected Governor by the Council some 30 years later) and involving several hundred armed men, which resulted in the removal of the obnoxious Governor.

It was the Maryland Proprietor's turn next. With the beginning of the Civil War in England, in 1642 (the King flees in 1646; Cromwell beheads him in 1649) one finds its contest transplanted to Maryland, with special intensity because of the Catholic faith of its Proprietor. Portentous was the arrest in 1644 by the Maryland Governor of the Protestant Captain, Richard Ingle, master of a trading vessel appropriately named the *Reformation*. This, coupled with the news that the Proprietor planned to intercede on the side of the King in the War, led to the overthrow of the Proprietor and his flight to Virginia where the Royal Governor, Sir William Berkeley, gave him refuge. For two years Maryland was locally governed, the Proprietor not being returned until 1647.

There followed a period of concessions and reforms on the part of Lord Baltimore, including some liberalizing of the colonial assembly, the appointment of a Protestant Governor, William Stone, the welcoming of Puritans to Maryland, and the issuance, in 1649, of the justly-famed Toleration Act. This last protected freedom of "conscience in matters of religion," for those accepting Christ's divinity, and specifically outlawed derogatory references to "heretick, Scismatick, Idolator, puritan, Independant, Prespiterian, popish prest, Jesuite, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, Brownist, Antinomian, Barrowist, Roundhead, Sepatist, or any other."

Yet there was hesitancy on the part of the Proprietor to acknowledge subordination to the Protectorate in England. This, combined with popular unrest induced by increasing concentration of land ownership, the continued domination of the Lord Proprietor, the latter's insistence on collecting quit-rents, and economic depression, resulted in the Proprietor's party losing control altogether of the provincial assembly. The Governor sought by arms to defeat the anti-Proprietor's party, but was overcome



in battle in March, 1655. Here, himself wounded, the Governor was jailed, four of his followers were executed and for three years Maryland once again was locally governed.

Again the restoration of the Proprietor in 1657 proved temporary, because his governor, Josias Fendall, allied himself with the popular majority in the assembly. In 1660, Maryland announced itself a republic, with Fendall probably aiming at uniting some of the other colonies under a system mimicking that of, and subordinate to, Cromwell in England.<sup>2</sup> But that very year Charles II was restored to his father's throne. Fendall was removed and condemned (and barred from holding office in the future, but is heard of again, nevertheless) and the Proprietor was restored.

## II

Elsewhere opposition to Proprietary rule, land engrossment, and quit-rent payments also burst forth in organized revolt. An instance is that of New Jersey in 1670, whose inhabitants rebelled, stopped quit-rent payments, established their own "rump" assembly and held control until the Dutch reconquest of New York and New Jersey in 1673. This in turn was undone, with the colonies being returned to the English by the Treaty of Westminster in 1674—who promptly restored the situation prevailing in New Jersey prior to the "upstart riots" of 1670.

But, the outstanding example of popular uprising, prior to the American Revolution itself, is Bacon's Rebellion of 1676. Concerning this there is a large body of published material, most notably the work of Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, and here but the barest summary is necessary.

Bacon's Rebellion was a harbinger of the greater rebellion that was to follow it by exactly a century. The Virginia uprising was directed against the economic subordination and exploitation of the colony by the English rulers, and against the tyrannical and corrupt administrative practices in the colony which were instituted for the purpose of enforcing that subordination. Hence,

the effort led by the young planter, Nathaniel Bacon, was multi-class, encompassing in its ranks slaves, indentured servants, free farmers and many planters; it was one in which women were, as an anti-Baconite contemporary noted, "great encouragers and assisters"; and it was one in which demands for political reform along democratic lines formed a central feature of the movement.

Specifically, Virginians found themselves caught in a vise of economic strangulation and political domination from which nothing promised relief but an appeal to arms. The Navigation Acts, passed in 1660, by giving the British a monopoly of the tobacco crop, had resulted in the fall of tobacco within a few years from three pence a pound, to less than half a penny. At the same time, the identical enactments had confined the Virginia market (and Maryland and North Carolina—then called Albemarle County) to the British merchants who, without competition, raised the prices on finished goods.

The scissors—the gap between what tobacco sold for and what purchased goods cost—expanding, Virginia planters and farmers went heavily in debt to British merchants, in the hope that loans would see them through the economic difficulties. But with the loans, went exorbitant interest charges which meant additional burdens rather than relief, and tighter dependence upon the British.

Efforts on the part of the colonists to meet the situation through diversifying their crops, or through industrial or commercial ventures resulted in effective negatives from England. And efforts to avoid the full impact of England's monopoly over the purchase of the tobacco crop by developing a strong inter-colonial trade in tobacco led to an Act, in 1673, placing a prohibitive tax of one penny a pound on tobacco shipped from one province to another.

These measures hit all planters, but they hit hardest at those with least wealth, for the richest had lower per-unit cost of production (especially through the use of slave labor, which became of some consequence by the early 1670's along the eastern seaboard) and could get better borrowing terms. Moreover, the



wealthy were able to invest in merchandising and in fur trading when tobacco planting was especially unprofitable.

Special circumstances aggravated the already very bad conditions. Of these three were of great consequence. One was the Anglo-Dutch rivalry (a prime source of the Navigation Acts, in the first place) which led to three wars, the last two of them fought 1664-1667 and 1672-1673. These resulted in very great loss to planters through the capture or destruction of merchant ships carrying tobacco and other crops. Second, a devastating hurricane, in 1667, left thousands homeless and destroyed most of the tobacco crop; and third, in 1672-73, an epidemic destroyed half the cattle in Virginia.

Added to this were colonial and county tax systems which discriminated against the moderately well-off and the poor and sharply in favor of the greatest landowners, and which kept getting more and more burdensome as the years went by. Thus, when taxes were raised yet again in 1674, scores of farmers gathered, arms in hand, in Kent County and swore to prevent their collection. Only upon the Royal Governor Berkeley's warning that those who persisted in their defiance would meet the fate of traitors, did the men disperse—to gather in greater force and throughout the colony after two more years of exasperation and after the appearance of a leader.

Nor does this yet explain, fully, the resort to arms in 1676. An additional strong cause was the perversion of the governmental apparatus by the Royal Governor and his class brothers who dominated the Council. Berkeley succeeded in building up a powerful political machine and thereby taking over control of the House of Burgesses, so that that (relatively) "popular" branch of colonial government, filled with Berkelian placemen, sat continuously, without fresh elections, from 1661, until imminent revolution forced Berkeley to call for an election early in 1676. And, by an act of 1670, the franchise was taken from all who were not landowners.

Meanwhile, through their wealth and their influence in London and their control of the colonial governmental apparatus,

including the courts, Berkeley and his cohorts lived in startling luxury, granted themselves the choicest lands, took the most lucrative public offices, pocketed much of the taxes, and won a monopoly of the extremely profitable fur trade.

So it was that Bacon, newly-come to Virginia, the descendant of nobility (he was kin to Francis Bacon) and himself a tobacco planter in the Virginia frontier region, was moved to declare, in 1675: "The poverty of the Country is such that all the power and sway is got into the hands of the rich, who by extortious advantages, having the common people in their debt, have always curbed and oppressed them in all manner of ways." And further, that how to mend matters was a great puzzlement since appeal had to be made to "the very persons our complaints do accuse."

Indian difficulties formed the catalyst of rebellion. These, of course, had begun with the colony's beginnings. Peace of a sort had come with a treaty of 1646, in which certain lands of Virginia were set aside for the use of the colonizers and the Indians respectively. Within two years the English had broken the agreement in fact, and broke it in law by 1649. There followed intense English expansion into Indian lands and so vigorous a practice of the indiscriminate killing of Indians that even the Virginia legislature tried to call a halt, in 1656, noting its "sad apprehension of the small account . . . of late made of shedding Indians' blood, though never so innocent." An Act passed six years later likewise admitted that growing Indian hostility was due to "violent intrusions of diverse English made into their [the Indians'] lands."

Matters with the Indians came to a head in 1675 when Virginians joined with Marylanders in a campaign of extermination aimed at the Susquehannas. At one point, some chiefs sent out as a truce party were treacherously seized by Virginians under a Major Trueman and slaughtered. As a result more or less sporadic warfare broke out all along the Virginia frontier, and the cry went up for governmental armed assistance.

This was slow in coming though certainly not because of any tenderness on the part of the Berkeley group. It was slow in



coming for that group made thousands of pounds from the Indian trade—buying fur and selling them many things in exchange—including guns, the westerners always believed. Hence, Bacon's remark: "These traders at the head of the rivers buy and sell our blood."

This was the precipitant of Bacon's treason. He organized and led an expedition against the Indians, without the Governor's permission, and for this was denounced a traitor. Nevertheless, Bacon's popularity was so great (he was elected to the House of Burgesses, though tainted a traitor, in the elections of 1676 that Berkeley finally called to assuage public ill-will) and the people's suffering so intense, that the traitor ousted the Governor. The details of the actual conflict between the Baconians and the forces of the Royal Governor need not be gone into here; suffice it to say that in pitched battle the Baconians won and drove the Governor from the capital and gained control of the colony for several months in 1676.

It is clear that Bacon envisaged a united resistance to colonial oppressions on the part of North Carolina, Maryland and Virginia; it is even probable that he desired to create this unity for the purpose of breaking away from England completely, which seems, also, to have been the dream somewhat earlier of Josias Fendall. Indeed, Professor Wertenbaker believes that had the Bacon insurrection occurred a few years earlier—during the Third Anglo-Dutch War—"it is possible that the entire Chesapeake Bay region might have been lost to England."

But such unity was not forged, though some efforts were made; and England was not then occupied in wars. Bacon's attempt failed. He himself, not yet thirty and, as a contemporary said, "the hopes and Darling of the People," died of a fever in August, 1676, and though fighting continued thereafter, Berkeley was back in full control early in 1677. Now, supported by 1,100 British troops, sent for the purpose, the Governor restored "order."

In the course of accomplishing this, 37 of the leading Bacon-

ians were executed. Most died without their executioners recording what they might have said, but record does exist of what one of them, Anthony Arnold, told the Royal Judges. "Kings have no rights," he said, "but what they got by conquest and the sword, and he who can by force of the sword deprive them thereof has as good and just a title to them as the King himself. If the King should deny to do me right I would think no more of it to sheath my sword in his heart or bowels than of my mortal enemies." Anthony Arnold, "resolved rebel and traitor," was given a special execution. He was removed to his own immediate neighborhood and there hanged in chains, "to be a more remarkable example than the rest."

The Commissioners sent by the King to look into the Virginia troubles soon realized that if the vengeful Berkeley were left to his purposes England might well lose Virginia. Berkeley was returned to England (where he very soon died) and another Governor replaced him. Certain reforms adopted by the "Bacon Legislature" were retained, including those which extended the suffrage to all free men (including free Negroes, who voted in Virginia until 1723), the powers of the Council were curtailed, county government was somewhat democratized, and greater popular control was provided in the enactment and collecting of taxes. Rather sweeping amnesties were also promulgated.

But no fundamental changes were made; on the contrary the supremacy of the English Parliament was affirmed, the Navigation Acts remained in force and, in a word, Virginia remained a colony. To end that, revolution, not reform was required.<sup>3</sup>

### III

Bacon's hopes for unity with Maryland and with Albemarle (North Carolina) sprang from the fact that the other two colonies suffered even as did Virginia from the Navigation Acts, from the tax act of 1673, from low-priced tobacco and from the deprivation of political and judicial rights. The fact is that in both of



them there were uprisings—on modest scales, compared with Bacon's—though in these cases they were directed against Proprietors rather than a Royal Governor.

In September, 1676, some 60 persons, led by William Davyes and John Pate, gathered in Calvert County, Maryland, and announced their opposition to current taxation and franchise policies and their intention not to swear to a loyalty oath newly demanded by the (Catholic) Proprietor. The meeting was forcibly dispersed, its objects denounced as treasonous, and Davyes and Pate were hanged.

Other leaders of the protest movement stepped forward, especially Josias Fendall again, and John Coode, and the Maryland authorities promised suffrage and taxation reforms. The failure to implement these promises led to another minor uprising, in 1681, which was suppressed; but a greater one, in 1689, again led by Coode, was to have more success.

Also in 1676, under the leadership of George Durant and John Culpeper, organized resistance appeared in Albemarle to efforts by the Proprietor's agent, Thomas Miller, to enforce the payment of quit-rent and certain tobacco taxes. Here the opposition was powerful enough to force the release from jail of Durant and the recall of the obnoxious Miller, but in neither Maryland nor in Albemarle, even as in Virginia, were truly significant alterations in the colonial apparatus obtained.

#### IV

The grievances of all the colonies overflowed the dam formed by Royal repression, with the "Glorious Revolution" in England. The impact of that event was tremendous throughout the colonial world and led to revolutionary attempts, collectively participated in by diverse classes in colonial society, notably in New England, New York, Maryland and North Carolina.

New England heard of the overthrow of James II in March, 1689. By the middle of April an uprising occurred in Boston, little blood was shed, Governor Andros and certain of his chief

officers were arrested, and each of the New England colonies re-adopted its separate political existence as it had existed prior to the Restoration of the Stuarts.

In New York the arbitrary government dominated by the great landlords and merchants—Bayard, Van Cortlandt, and Schuyler—who had run affairs very much like a closed corporation and had in the course of this aroused deep opposition among the entire remaining population, faced rebellion under the leadership of Jacob Leisler. After a brief skirmish between the mutinous militia and a few dispirited regular British troops, the latter caved in, and the acting governor, Nicholson, sailed back to England. From 1689 to 1691 most of New York was ruled by the Leisler revolutionary government representing a coalition of the smaller merchants, the storekeepers, artisans and mechanics. Under this government certain landed and commercial monopolies were dissolved, advances in self-government were made, and reforms instituted in the tax system.

Meanwhile, in England, though Leisler protested his loyalty to the newly-ascendant Protestant majesties, William himself refused to cherish such goings-on as the taking into their own hands, by the majority of New York City inhabitants, of their own government. The King appointed a Colonel Henry Slough-ter, Governor of his New York province and sent him, with soldiers, to take over the post.

War with France delayed the departure of Slough-ter for several months, and only a part of his expedition arrived in New York. This group, under a Captain Ingolsby, demanded the surrender of the city, but Leisler would not oblige, and after a minor skirmish, succeeded in restraining the Captain. Finally, early in 1691, Slough-ter himself did arrive and placed Leisler and his son-in-law, Milborne, under arrest.

Leisler's opponents, Bayard, Nichols and Livingston, pressured the Governor into ordering the execution of Leisler and Milborne, and both were hanged before their appeal from the death sentence had even been heard by the Crown. Most of the democratic reforms of Leisler were undone, although the existence of



an Assembly—unknown in New York before Leisler—was affirmed, albeit its powers were rather circumscribed. The Leisler wing in New York politics remained potent for years after his execution. In 1695, Parliament was prevailed upon to remove the attainder of treason from Jacob Leisler's name and to restore his estate to his heirs. Furthermore, the New York Assembly, in 1702, voted an indemnity of £2,700 to those heirs.

The "Glorious Revolution" in England helped stimulate revolutionary events in Maryland, too. That Proprietary government had been swept by unrest continually, as we have already seen. A characteristic reply to this by the ruler was a tightening of his control, so that, in 1670, it was decreed that the Governor himself would fix the number of representatives to be allowed to each county in the provincial government, and that none but that official could change this number.

The Proprietor, moreover, dealt with the colony as though it were indeed simply his property, rather than the habitation of several thousand families, so that he made of its offices mere sinecures for his relatives and personal friends. Heavy assessment and taxes and great corruption followed, and scandals recurred, as when the acting governor, George Talbot (Lord Baltimore's nephew) murdered the royal collector of customs and fled the colony.

It was this last act that led the Proprietor to appoint as his deputy, and the president of the colony's Council, one William Joseph, an intense Jacobite in politics and a fervid Catholic. Greeting the provincial legislature late in 1688 he informed its members that, "There is no power but of God and the power by which we are assembled here is undoubtedly derived from God, to the King and from the King to his Excellency the Lord Proprietor and from his said Lordship to us." This was fine and classical doctrine for medieval Europe and for absolute monarchy, but rather anachronistic for late 17th century English political theorizing and certainly backward, not to say provocative, for late 17th century English America.

Shortly after Joseph had assured the colonial planters and

merchants that their sole duty was to obey his Lordship, the English bourgeoisie made good their rejection of such ideas with the crowning of William and Mary, and with the adoption of the Bill of Rights of 1689, in which the supremacy of Parliament was affirmed.

The Lord Proprietor was slow in directing his Maryland colony to acknowledge the overthrow of James, and the new order of things, and the Lord's officials in America were even slower in implementing such direction. When it appeared that these officials were fortifying the statehouse at St. Mary's, capital of the Province, several hundred men, led by the old rebel, John Coode, marched on the city and with almost no resistance—since the Governor's troops refused to fight—took over command. Shortly thereafter, August 1, 1689, Joseph himself surrendered, and the insurgents, under the name of the "Association in arms for the defense of the Protestant religion" (or, more simply, the Protestant Association), and in convention assembled, announced the ousting of the Lord Proprietor and their loyalty to the monarchs of the Revolution.

The Association then called the Assembly into session, and that body, which in November, 1688, had heard the Proprietor's officer assure them that they were without power, now in August, 1689, set up an interim government and sent Coode, the rebel, to England to get Royal confirmation of their acts. In 1691, Maryland passed out of the political control of the Proprietor (whose property rights, however, were not molested) and became a royal colony, with a governor, council and assembly.

It is worth noting that the revolutionary Coode government was in regular communication with the rebel government in New York and that both expressed a desire for cooperation and unity. This solidarity appeared, as we have seen, in earlier rebellions and reflected a growing sense of solidarity in the colonies generally.



## V

In South Carolina and Albemarle County, popular unrest was at a boiling point throughout the latter half of the 17th century. Insurrectionary attempts were made in both areas consequent upon the "Glorious Revolution," but in both the Proprietors managed to hold on for another generation. In 1719, after severe religious dissensions with the Proprietors, and after these worthies had disallowed certain laws passed by the assembly, including one regulating elections to that body—and contemporaneous with severe economic depression, Indian attacks and threats of war with Spain—revolution succeeded in Albemarle and in South Carolina. Parliament in 1729 confirmed the ousting of the Proprietors and set up two separate royal colonies in North and South Carolina.

Charles M. Andrews, whose monumental study, *The Colonial Period of American History*, is of special value because of the light it sheds on the facts concerning these uprisings against the colonial Proprietors, evaluated them in a way with which this writer cannot agree. Professor Andrews, in the second volume of the aforementioned work, having in mind specifically the Maryland events, wrote:

It is a mistake to read into such a protest anything democratic or anything anticipatory of the American Revolution, for the agitation was for those rights enjoyed by Englishmen of the seventeenth century and nothing more. Such a system [as that of the Proprietors], absolute and paternal and demanding from all within its jurisdiction unqualified submission and obedience, provoked resistance, because it did not guarantee to the people of Maryland the rights of free-born Englishmen, such as the subjects of the king were then enjoying at home.

But is not the struggle for "the rights of free-born Englishmen" by people living under a system demanding "unqualified submission and obedience," one which had democratic content, when viewed historically, no matter how limited may have been the rights of such Englishmen in the 17th century? And is not

the American Revolution conducted under the slogan of the demand for the rights of Englishmen? True it is that this is in another century, and the rights had in the meantime somewhat expanded; true it is also that the colonists in order to obtain the rights of Englishmen discovered during their Revolution that they had to cease being Englishmen. But is there nothing "anticipatory" at all in the fact that the colonists, separated by 90 years, do fight for an extension of their freedoms under the same slogan—and that these are the same colonies and the same colonial power?

The events of 1688-89 in England did further political and religious freedom in the colonies. The assertion of the supremacy of Parliament in the affairs of England bulwarked the claims of colonial legislatures for their supremacy in terms of colonial government, especially where such government was concerned with purely internal colonial affairs. The whole emphasis given to concepts of individual freedom, summed up in the term "the rights of Englishmen," became, too, precious to the colonists and of enormous consequence to their thinking and writing.

This concern for individual liberty and for self-government, or, at least, for the supremacy of the colonial legislatures in matters purely colonial, was to grow as the colonies themselves grew, and as their social orders matured. At the same time, the triumph of Parliament in England did not mean a lessening of concentration by the English bourgeoisie—now ensconced in power, albeit in alliance with the great landowners—on the subordination of the colonies and the use of them for the enrichment of that class and the enhancement of its power.