

## Solemn League and Covenant

With the repeal of the all but one of the Townshend duties and the new government of Lord North eager to avoid more trouble with the colonies, colonial moderates and royal officials hope to discredit the radical opposition.

By the end of 1773 there had been a peaceful interlude of about three years. But in December of that year the so-called Boston Tea Party and London's reaction in the early months of 1774 shattered the quiet.

In the spring and summer of 1774, news had reached Boston that Britain's Parliament had enacted a number of measures in retaliation for the Tea Party of late 1773. Known in the colonies as the "Intolerable Acts", these most notably closed the port of Boston, revoked the colony's charter, and outlawed town meetings.

Outraged, Samuel Adams and his colleagues in the Boston committee of correspondence considered a non-importation pledge known as the "Solemn League and Covenant". (The name of the document mimicked that of the 1644 pledge between England's Parliament and Scotland, pledging religious reform in return for support against Charles I during the English Civil Wars.)

The Covenant called for its signers to halt the purchase of British goods after August 31 and, further, to stop dealing with those who did not sign.

The document was fiercely resisted by area merchants. In addition, there was growing sentiment amongst Bostonians toward waiting for a more comprehensive, inter-colony non-importation agreement.

During the summer of 1774, colonists debated the merits of the 'Solemn League and Covenant,' a proposal offered by the Boston Committee of Correspondence to cease all trade with the mother country. While not necessarily opposed to the idea of a boycott, leaders in other colonies (and other Massachusetts towns) hesitate to follow Boston's lead.

The precise terms of resistance, they argue, should be formulated among, agreed to and followed by all.

Although Adams ultimately managed to find support at the Boston town meeting in late June, it did not come easily. In an effort to swing around the Boston opposition, Adams and the committee of correspondence sent the document into the surrounding countryside via the network formed by each town's committee of correspondence.

Apparently, many towns found it difficult to support the action, and those who did usually made modifications to the language on the printed form they received from Boston. In the end, the effort was eclipsed in the fall of 1774 by similar actions taken by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Congress first visits the issues of nonimportation, nonexportation and nonconsumption in late September. The discussion centers on logistics and on the particular interests of individual provinces. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

Those who signed the non-importation pledge promised to stop purchasing British goods, but also to cease business dealings with those who continued. This agreement eventually spread beyond Boston to surrounding communities such as Concord. (Concord Museum)

WE the Subscribers, inhabitants of the town of *Sandwich* having taken into our serious consideration the precarious state of the liberties of North-America, and more especially the present distressed condition of this insulted province, embarrassed as it is by several acts of the British parliament, tending to the entire subversion of our natural and charter rights; among which is the act for blocking up the harbour of Boston: and being fully sensible of our indispensable duty to lay hold on every means in our power to preserve and recover the much injured constitution of our country; and conscious at the same time of no alternative between the horrors of slavery, or the carnage and desolation of a civil war, but a suspension of all commercial intercourse with the island of Great Britain: Do, in the presence of God, solemnly and in good faith, covenant and engage with each other, 1st, That from henceforth we will suspend all commercial intercourse with the said island of Great Britain, until the said act for blocking up the said harbour be repealed, and a full restoration of our charter rights be obtained. And,

2dly, That there may be the less temptation to others to continue in the said, now dangerous commerce, we do in like manner solemnly covenant that we will not buy, purchase or consume, or suffer any person, by, for or under us to purchase or consume, in any manner whatever, any goods, wares or merchandize which shall arrive in America from Great Britain aforesaid, from and after the last day of August next ensuing. And in order as much as in us lies to prevent our being interrupted and defeated in this only peaceable measure, entered into for the recovery and preservation of our rights, we agree to break off all trade, commerce <sup>and</sup> dealings whatever with all persons, who perfering their own private interest to the salvation of their now perishing country, shall still continue to import goods from Great Britain, or shall purchase of those who do import.

3dly, That such persons may not have it in their power to impose upon us by any pretence whatever, we further agree to purchase no article of merchandize from them, or any of them, who shall not have signed this, or a similar covenant, or will not produce an oath, certified by a magistrate to be by them taken to the following purpose: *viz.* I *A.B.* of *C* in the county of *D* do solemnly swear that the goods I have now on hand, and propose for sale, have not, to the best of my knowledge, been imported from Great Britain, into any port of America since the last day of August, one thousand seven hundred and seventy four, and that I will not, contrary to the spirit of an agreement entering into through this province import or purchase of any person so importing any goods as aforesaid, until the port or harbour of Boston, shall be opened, and we are fully restored to the free use of our constitutional and charter rights. And,

Lastly, we agree, that after this, or a similar covenant has been offered to any person and they refuse to sign it, or produce the oath, aforesaid, we will consider them as contumacious importers, and withdraw all commercial connexions with them, so far as not to purchase of them, any article whatever, and publish their names to the world.

Witness our hands, June,

1774.

The Solemn League and Covenant was the first concerted response to the Boston Port Act. Samuel Adams and Joseph Warren are believed to be the architects and authors of this document, issued by the Boston Committee of Correspondence, and distributed to towns throughout Massachusetts. It is a more forceful non-consumption and non-importation agreement than any preceding it.

Joseph Warren stumbled politically in the initial implementation of the Covenant when Samuel Adams was away from Boston at a meeting of the House of Representatives in Salem. Despite bluster in the Boston Gazette of countrymen allegedly clamoring in droves to sign the document, acceptance was in fact spotty.

The growing likelihood over the summer of 1774 that a Continental Congress would become a reality, combined to render moot the Solemn League and Covenant.

Information here is primarily from Massachusetts Historical Society; Concord Museum; Westford; Dr Joseph Warren on the Web

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young