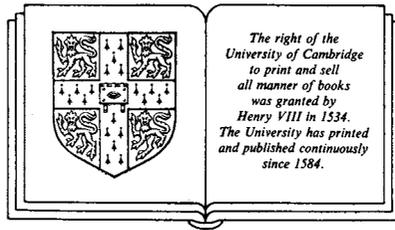


The Bells of Victory

*The Pitt–Newcastle Ministry
and the Conduct of the
Seven Years' War,
1757–1762*

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INTRODUCTION

The Outbreak of War and Formation of the Ministry

I

The death of Henry Pelham in March 1754 prompted George II to forecast he would have no more peace.¹ He was thinking only domestically. He was not anticipating the war which was shortly to reduce the House of Hanover to its lowest ebb. Had George II been able to see into the future he would have found that Britain was to be threatened, Minorca lost, the precious Electorate overrun and his favourite son, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, disgraced. Equally distressing, though less surprising, the King would have discovered that he was to be the victim of a cabal, whereby his closet was forced and a ministry formed of men personally obnoxious to him. True, the tide of military disaster turned, but it is doubtful if the old King would have found much consolation therein, while the Electorate was beleaguered and the government dominated by men for whom he had, at heart, such scant regard.

The origins of the Seven Years' War between Britain and France are to be sought in the previous 150 years of these two proud nations. To the French, the British were a dangerous people in their constitutional and religious polity: France a country of orthodoxy in both. To the British, the French were perpetrators of despotic monarchy and a persecuting church: Britain a constitutional country nurtured in civil and religious liberty. These differences were highlighted by physical proximity, separated as the two nations were by a narrow band of water. Their rivalry was further increased by an intense competition for trade and empire, especially in North America. As a result, friction on that continent was much increased, for both nations recognized its value in enhancing their power. The differences were sufficiently serious at the Aix-la-Chapelle peace conference to be referred to a separate negotiation. But with such high stakes both powers made only the feeblest attempt to agree. As the diplomats talked, the French in particular took action in the disputed regions of the Ohio, Great Lakes and Nova Scotia. Their operations did not go unnoticed. In August 1753 the

¹ H. Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George II* (3 vols., London, 1846-47), I, 378.

British colonial governors were instructed to resist 'force with force', and it was while the Virginian authorities were responding to this that the first hostilities occurred, when a small expedition under the then unknown George Washington clashed with a French force guarding the Forks of the Ohio.² Minor in itself, the engagement symbolized the determination of both powers to make good their claims in North America. Before the dispute had been settled, most of Europe was at war.

But initially it seemed that domestic problems would be the more contentious as George II pondered the question of a successor to Pelham. Nominally, there were several candidates for the King's favour as First Lord of the Treasury.³ In the end he chose the dead man's brother, Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle, currently the northern Secretary of State, who by seniority and long service could claim to be the most experienced if not the most accomplished British politician.⁴

The first problem of the Newcastle ministry was America, where some action was required to reverse Washington's defeat. Since the provincials seemed incapable of doing the job, the government decided to dispatch Major-General Braddock with two regiments and officers for raising two more.⁵ Unfortunately, this action prompted the French to strengthen similarly their position in Canada which in turn was unacceptable to the British. Trade with the mainland colonies was now more valuable than that with the West Indies, the previous jewel in the nation's empire. A further response was therefore necessary, this time by the dispatch of a fleet under Admiral Boscawen with orders to stop the French reinforcements from reaching Canada. The policy of the administration was simple and logical. Since America was the cause of the dispute, America was where hostilities should occur, though as a precaution steps were taken to mobilize the fleet and army in Britain.⁶ A number of warships were taken out of the reserve, press warrants issued and some regiments increased to their wartime strength of 815 men.⁷

Regrettably, there was just one flaw to this policy: Hanover. As the French quickly made clear they would not scruple to extend the conflict to Europe whenever it suited them.⁸ The Electorate was Britain's Achilles' heel, for its defence was a commitment that no government could avoid.

² T. C. Pease, *Anglo-French Boundary Disputes in the West, 1747-1763* (Springfield, Illinois, 1936), 45.

³ J. C. D. Clark, *The Dynamics of Change: The Crisis of the 1750s and English Party Systems* (Cambridge, 1982), 45-46.

⁴ The best recent biography of Newcastle is that by R. Browning, *The Duke of Newcastle* (New Haven, 1975).

⁵ Newcastle to Lord Albemarle, 5 Sept 1754, Add. Mss 32,850 ff 218-224.

⁶ Cabinet Memorandum, 18 Mar. 1755, Add. Mss 32,996 ff 48-50.

⁷ Charge of Augmenting the Forces, 12 Mar. 1755, Add. Mss 32,853 ff 247, 259. The order to mobilize the fleet was issued by the Admiralty on 16 Jan 1755, Adm 3/63.

⁸ Newcastle to William Bentinck, 11 Mar 1755, Add. Mss 32,853 ff 193-199.

The royal succession and, by implication, the settlement of 1689, all depended on this. It had traditionally been protected by an alliance with Austria and Holland. Unfortunately, the Dutch were tired of European strife, claiming that the present conflict was of no concern to them, while the Austrians saw the expulsion of Prussia from Silesia, not the defence of Flanders or the Rhine, as their prime objective.⁹

Another complication was Prussia. Frederick II was allied to France and might join an attack on the Electorate.

It was for this reason that the ministry sought a subsidy treaty with Russia for the use of 50,000 men.¹⁰ Otherwise it could only adopt the less grandiose scheme of assembling an army of Hanoverian and other local forces. A number of German princes were accustomed to support themselves by hiring out their troops. A start was accordingly made with Hesse for 8,000 men,¹¹ and talks were also conducted with the Danes. The Electoral forces themselves numbered 27,000, so a reasonable defence might yet be provided.¹²

Even so, by the autumn of 1755 the situation of the ministry appeared unenviable. In the first place its American policies had not succeeded. Braddock had got within seven miles of his objective, only to be defeated because he had not had time to accustom his men properly.¹³ Elsewhere Boscawen had missed his prey in fog off Newfoundland, while at home the ministry had become involved in naval hostilities that seemed certain to embrace the continent next spring.¹⁴ The nation did not have a dependable ally in Europe. Only one development gave cause for hope. In May 1755 Frederick II had indicated a willingness to talk and subsequent soundings had revealed that he was not happy about his alliance with France.¹⁵ The Anglo-French disputes seemed to him rather pointless, given the barren nature of the contested territory. However, he was anxious that they did not lead to a European war, for he did not relish being asked by France to invade Hanover.¹⁶ Equally, he was concerned at the British negotiation with Russia.

The Convention of Westminster, whereby Britain and Prussia agreed to assist each other in keeping foreign troops out of Germany, initially seemed

⁹ The diplomatic background to the war is related in D. B. Horn, *Great Britain and Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁰ For the terms of the treaty see C. Parry (ed.), *The Consolidated Treaty Series* (New York, 1969), XL, 271–283.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 261–267.

¹² Newcastle to Holderness, 6 June 1755, Add. Mss 32,855 ff 352–364. Newcastle to Holderness, 20 July 1755, Add. Mss 32,857 ff 162–172.

¹³ S. M. Pargellis, 'Braddock's Defeat', *American Historical Review*, xli, 253–269.

¹⁴ J. S. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy* (London, 1907), I, 50–62.

¹⁵ Baron Munchausen to Newcastle, 20 June 1755, Add. Mss 32,856 f 70. Holderness to Newcastle, 30 July 1755, Add. Mss 32,857 f 452.

¹⁶ Frederick II to the Duke of Brunswick, 14 Aug 1755, Add. Mss 32,858 ff 225–229.

a master-stroke.¹⁷ The French would hardly dare attack Hanover now. Indeed, the treaty apparently completed the isolation of France. What Newcastle and Frederick II did not realize was that their union of January 1756 simply speeded up a realignment of the powers which was already in progress and in no way favourable to either. Austria, convinced that Britain would never be of use in the recovery of Silesia, determined to seek an understanding with France, the traditional foe.¹⁸ In the event, Britain had simply exchanged Austria for Prussia as the main guarantor of Hanover's integrity. Another unforeseen result was that France, prevented temporarily from attacking Hanover, began planning an invasion of Britain as the best means of conducting the war.

Foreign embarrassments, however, were not the only problems to assail the ministry at this time, for internal struggles were also distracting it. The elevation of Newcastle to the Treasury had been secured at the expense of two rivals, Henry Fox and William Pitt, and Fox had subsequently had to be promoted Secretary of State.¹⁹ This, however, bitterly offended Pitt. He was a deeply ambitious man, and for ten years he had loyally served the Pelhams in the hope of ultimate preferment. Seeing no chance of this he had gone into opposition.²⁰ By good fortune allies were waiting to embrace him at Leicester House, the establishment of the Prince of Wales, which was traditionally hostile to the King and his ministry. The heir's mother, Princess Augusta, and her principal adviser, Lord Bute, were fearful that Cumberland might prove another Richard III. The promotion of Fox, the protégé of Cumberland, was thus a serious blow to the Prince's interest, for the protection of which new allies were required.²¹

Nevertheless, had not foreign disasters intervened, it is likely that Pitt would have spent the rest of the reign in the ranks of the opposition. National disaster was as much the making of him as it was of Winston Churchill, two centuries later. First came the invasion threat of 1756. This found the government short of troops. Though the Newcastle ministry had done its best to expand the army, there was still a shortage of trained men. In this situation, the ministry first requested assistance from the Dutch under the 1713 treaty guaranteeing the protestant succession. When the Republic refused, the ministry had no alternative but to summon the Hanoverians and Hessians, which was possible following the agreement with Prussia. But, though a sensible precaution, Pitt could assert it was a shameful abnegation of the nation's own manhood.²²

¹⁷ Parry (ed.), *Consolidated Treaty Series*, xl, 293–298. *JHC*, xxvii, 602–603.

¹⁸ Parry (ed.), *Consolidated Treaty Series*, xl, 337–353.

¹⁹ James Earl Waldegrave, *Memoirs from 1754 to 1758* (London, 1821), 31–32.

²⁰ Remarks, 14 Apr 1755, printed in W. S. Taylor and J. H. Pringle (eds.), *The Correspondence of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (London, 1838), I, 134–137.

²¹ Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, II, 36–56. Waldegrave, *Memoirs*, 35–41. Clark, *Dynamics of Change*, 153–195.

²² Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, II, 187–189.

The next blow to the ministry came with the loss of Minorca. There was much debate then and since about the responsibility for this. However, some of the blame must fall on Lord Anson, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Rumours of French preparations in the Mediterranean had been rife since the previous autumn. Anson had discounted them. He told Lord Hardwicke, the Lord Chancellor, his father-in-law: 'I think it would be a dangerous measure to part with your naval strength... which cannot be recalled if wanted, when I am strongly of opinion that whenever the French intend anything in earnest, their attack will be against this Country.'²³ The English fleet in the Mediterranean, therefore, was not strengthened until the intentions of the French were clear. The decision was not necessarily unsound. Although British concentration on the Channel permitted the French to land on Minorca, the position could still have been saved had Admiral Byng succeeded in driving off the French fleet under the Marquis de La Galissonière. The British could then have relieved the garrison in Fort St Philip and trapped the besieging army in a snare of its own making.

Unfortunately, Byng was not the man to seize his opportunity. To some extent everything went wrong at the same time. The engagement with La Galissonière left the British force damaged with the enemy still in possession of the waters before St Philip. Because Anson had concentrated the fleet at home, Byng had no reserve of men and ships. He was therefore unable to relieve the garrison which had to surrender after a siege of fifty-six days.²⁴

Although the invasion never materialized and the catastrophe at Minorca could be blamed on Byng, this did nothing to strengthen the ministry, for these reverses brought out all the latent tensions between Fox and Newcastle. From the start Newcastle had made it clear that he had resorted to Fox's services with reluctance. Fox had accordingly found his position increasingly intolerable, and, convinced that Newcastle would pass the responsibility for Minorca to him, he determined to resign.²⁵

His departure was a double blow to Newcastle, for it was preceded by the loss of one of his most able subordinates, William Murray the Attorney-General, from the Commons to be Lord Chief Justice and a peer as Lord Mansfield.

Initially, Newcastle looked to Pitt to fill the void, even though Pitt had intimated that he would not serve with him and had opposed the Hessian and Russian treaties.²⁶ Hardwicke, Newcastle's principal confidant, was certain that if Pitt was gratified in the matter of high office, other difficulties would not be allowed to stand in his way.²⁷ However, on this occasion Pitt

²³ Anson to Hardwicke, 6 Dec 1755, Add. Mss 35.395 f 383.

²⁴ Corbett, *Seven Years' War*, I, 96-130.

²⁵ Paper delivered to the King, 15 Oct 1756, Yorke, II, 319.

²⁶ Newcastle to Hardwicke, 14 Oct 1756, Yorke, II, 321-322.

²⁷ Hardwicke to Newcastle, 29 Aug 1756, Yorke, II, 310-311.

insisted he could not serve with Newcastle, since all the 'mistakes in the conduct of the war had been committed' while he was 'First Minister'. That he was being insincere was shown by his readiness to retain the other ministers who, as Hardwicke pointed out, were equally culpable for the present situation.²⁸

As it was improper to refuse office on grounds of personality alone, Pitt also raised a number of conditions regarding measures. First he insisted that an enquiry be held into the loss of Minorca. Then he wanted the recent incident of a Hanoverian soldier caught stealing a handkerchief to be investigated. In addition, the passing of a Militia Bill had to be made a matter of the highest priority. All these promised political advantage. An enquiry into the loss of Minorca would embarrass Newcastle and neutralize his support. The affair of the Hanoverian soldier would enable Pitt to exploit the intense chauvinism which was such a feature of eighteenth-century English life. Finally, a Militia Bill would have considerable appeal for the Tory Members of Parliament whose support would be crucial for any administration in which neither Fox nor Newcastle was a member. On the conduct of the war, Pitt had few ideas beyond asserting that the policy of the previous government had been too Hanoverian.²⁹ This also was largely window-dressing, for as Lord Waldegrave, a friend of the King, observed, these 'reasonable falsehoods' were simply bandied about to bring the opposition into power. Once in office they would be ready to 'talk a different language', as Pitt was now doing by his silent acceptance of the treaties with Hesse and Prussia.³⁰

In these circumstances Newcastle was unready to brave another session of Parliament, for as Lord Holderness, the northern Secretary, later observed, though he had both 'parliamentary strength and confidence at St James's', he could make use of neither for 'want of a leader in the Commons'.³¹ Resigning with him were Hardwicke and Anson. Hardwicke wanted to retire after being Lord Chancellor for many years. Anson was too closely identified with the loss of Minorca to contemplate staying.³²

The way was now open for a more thorough reconstruction of the government. But while it was recognized that Pitt must be given a leading office, neither he nor his immediate faction were to have the key post of First Lord of the Treasury.³³ The new administration could not in any case be composed of one party. As Horace Walpole observed, Pitt did not have

²⁸ Hardwicke to Joseph Yorke, 31 Oct 1756, Yorke, II, 330-334.

²⁹ Relation of a Conference with Mr Pitt, 24 Oct 1756, Yorke, II, 277-281.

³⁰ Waldegrave, *Memoirs*, 62.

³¹ Holderness to Mitchell, 8 Feb 1757, Holderness Correspondence, Egerton, 3460 f 167, BL.

³² Hardwicke to Yorke, 31 Oct 1756, Yorke, II, 333.

³³ Bedford to the Duchess of Bedford, 2 Nov 1756, printed in Lord John Russell (ed.), *Correspondence of John, Fourth Duke of Bedford* (London, 1843), II, 206-209.

enough relatives for this and to survive the new ministry would have to depend heavily on the supporters of Newcastle, though Pitt was hopeful of Tory assistance.³⁴ In these circumstances it was thought best if the Duke of Devonshire headed the new government, being a non-controversial figure who carried the respect of all the factions. Hence, Pitt became Secretary of State for the southern department; Lord Temple, his brother-in-law, First Lord of the Admiralty; George Grenville, another brother-in-law, a lord of the Treasury; while Henry Legge was given the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Pitt initially wanted to be northern Secretary so that he would deal with Hanover. He told Devonshire that if Sir Thomas Robinson, a former holder, was given the southern department, 'the King would find in him an old servant his Majesty would be easy with, and I a colleague very able to rectify my very many and great defects in an office I am a stranger to'.³⁵ George II, however, refused. It was bad enough having Pitt in office, let alone having him deal with the Electorate.

II

Even his harshest critics in 1756 had to concede that Pitt was a man of unusual gifts. It was of course on his parliamentary abilities that he was judged, for he had had little opportunity to demonstrate his administrative talents. Since his first appearance in the Commons in 1735 he had held only two minor positions, one as Vice-Treasurer of Ireland, the other as Paymaster-General. However, with the exception of Fox and Murray, Pitt had after 1754 no rival in the Commons as a speaker, thrilling his listeners with orations in the style of a Demosthenes or Cicero, whom he had studied avidly and on whom he consciously modelled himself.³⁶

Pitt's great love of the classics was not untypical of the age. Rhetorical embellishment in a speech was as acceptable as inlaid marquetry in a commode. But style and rhetoric were not the only qualities admired and some commentators were inclined to be critical of Pitt's excessive attention to form.³⁷ Such qualities did not become someone who had had little experience outside the narrow world of politics.³⁸ His career as a soldier had been brief and, unlike many contemporaries, he never studied the law or interested himself in finance. His associations with the City of London were entirely political and confined mainly to the tradesmen element on the Common Council, for with the great financiers he had had few dealings.³⁹

³⁴ Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, II, 263–265. Clark, *Dynamics of Change*, 295–300.

³⁵ Pitt to Devonshire, 2 Nov 1756, DPC.

³⁶ S. Ayling, *The Elder Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (London, 1976), 106–109.

³⁷ Notably Mansfield. See his comments in T. C. Hansard (ed.), *The Parliamentary History of England*, xv, 1753–1765 (London, 1813), 606.

³⁸ Waldegrave, *Memoirs*, 16–17. ³⁹ Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, III, 173.

Curiously, in view of the office to which he aspired, he appears to have shown little interest in writing. He never indulged in that favourite eighteenth-century pastime, political pamphleteering. His correspondence was generally brief and he rarely committed his thoughts to paper, even for speaking in the Commons. On the other hand, he had a good knowledge of French and knew something of Europe, having studied at the University of Utrecht before undertaking a tour of France and Switzerland.⁴⁰

The admission of Pitt to office has usually been presented as a decisive break in the conduct of the war. However, except for the florid tone of the royal speech, the plans of the ministry were little different to those of the previous government when the King unveiled them to Parliament.⁴¹ This was hardly surprising, for the main outlines of the war had been determined. These were the assertion of Britain's claims in America and the security of the King's dominions elsewhere. The only difference was that by the end of 1756 the problems had become more acute, both in Europe and overseas. Except for the consolidation of the British position in Nova Scotia, nothing of consequence had been effected across the Atlantic. Indeed, the previous twelve months had witnessed a further setback, following the destruction in August 1756 of Oswego, the vital trading-post on Lake Ontario.⁴² Elsewhere, the East India Company had lost its principal station in Bengal to the forces of Siraj-ud-Daula. Of the Company's personnel, 113 had been suffocated in the Black Hole of Calcutta.

The position was equally bad in Germany, for the Franco-Austrian alliance had prompted Frederick II to invade Saxony to forestall any encirclement of Prussia. The result was what his treaty with Britain was supposed to avoid, a war in Germany. The tsarina, fearful of Frederick II's designs, quickly abandoned the British subsidy for an understanding with France, followed by Sweden and most of the South German princes.⁴³ The only consolation was that neither Austria nor Russia had so far committed themselves to assist France against Hanover. A war with those powers might still be avoided.

Initially, the ministry had few plans on how to cope with this situation beyond the forming of a militia, though Frederick II was not short of ideas. He suggested establishing an army to observe the French on the Rhine, the making of descents on the coasts of Normandy and Brittany, deploying

⁴⁰ Ayling, *The Elder Pitt*, 32–35, 41–42.

⁴¹ The text of the royal speech can be found in *JHC*, xxvii, 621, and should be compared with that for the previous year, *ibid.*, 297.

⁴² Events across the Atlantic are fully described in L. H. Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution*, vi, *The Great War for the Empire: the Years of Defeat, 1754–1757* (New York, 1946).

⁴³ J. O. Lindsay (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vii, *The Old Regime, 1713–1763* (Cambridge, 1957), 440–464.

British naval forces in the Baltic and Mediterranean and using diplomacy to bring the Dutch and Turks into the struggle.⁴⁴

Such views were too grandiose for the present, though some were to bear fruit later. The need for diplomatic action was recognized, though neither Holland nor Turkey were felt to be practical objectives. The ministry preferred to set its sights lower on Denmark, whose goodwill was a prerequisite for any fleet entering the Baltic.⁴⁵ Militarily, the ministry found itself hampered by the small size of the army. Despite the creation of twenty-five new battalions by the Newcastle ministry, the army at home still numbered fewer than 30,000 men.⁴⁶ This was partly why the new government wanted a Militia Bill. While the country remained so defenceless, it was inevitable that a large proportion of its military force would be tied down. The proposals of the ministry were presented by George and Charles Townshend and were for 60,000 men. However, suspicion of their political composition led to the number being reduced to 37,000. Many Whigs feared that otherwise Tories of dubious loyalty would infiltrate the government. Even this number would take time to establish.⁴⁷

It was these difficulties that led Cumberland to report to the Earl of Loudoun, the British Commander-in-Chief in America: 'Nothing can be worse than our situation here at home... without a plan or even a desire to have one.'⁴⁸ The latter was unfair, though even for America Pitt does not appear to have had any clear views. Like all political figures, he had never been to that continent, nor had he much chance of studying the departmental correspondence. On the first outbreak of fighting in 1754 Pitt had believed that the campaigning ought to be left primarily to the provincials who were better qualified for the backcountry.⁴⁹ However, if the ministry was uncertain how to proceed, the commanders in America were not. After the abortive campaign of 1756, knowledgeable observers like Sir Charles Hardy concluded that nothing could be achieved by mounting a series of local attacks on the French outposts as had been done before. The official outbreak of war meant that something more ambitious could be

⁴⁴ Mitchell to Holderness, 9 Dec 1756, SP 90/67.

⁴⁵ C. W. Eldon, *England's Subsidy Policy towards the Continent during the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763* (Philadelphia, 1938), 87-88.

⁴⁶ Ten new regiments were established at the end of 1755, Newcastle Cabinet Memorandum, 16 Dec 1755, Add. Mss 32,996 f 321. In the summer of 1756 the decision was taken to raise another fifteen battalions, Barrington to James West, 7 Aug 1756, WO 4/52. These were subsequently redesignated regiments. See *JHC*, xxvii, 387-388, 632-633.

⁴⁷ J. R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: The Story of a Political Issue, 1660-1802* (London, 1965), 127-140.

⁴⁸ Cumberland to Loudoun, 23 Dec 1756, printed in S. M. Pargellis (ed.), *Military Affairs in North America: 1748-1765: Selected Documents from the Cumberland Papers in Windsor Castle* (New York, 1936), 262-263.

⁴⁹ Newcastle to Hardwicke, 2 Oct 1754, Add. Mss 32,737 ff 24-26.

considered against the French in the St Lawrence valley.⁵⁰ Loudoun accordingly suggested to Cumberland the dispatch of a powerful fleet and 10,000 additional troops, though to ensure acceptance he sent a special emissary, Thomas Pownall.⁵¹

Loudoun need not have worried. As Pownall shortly reported, his proposal had 'become the favourite scheme, the thing after the Minister's own heart'.⁵² Pitt had always made the maritime interests of Britain a principal consideration, if only as part of his anti-Hanover stance. Unfortunately, as he soon discovered, implementing the plan was not so easy. Anson had left the administration a formidable fleet of 93 ships of the line and 125 other vessels in commission, manned by 54,000 seamen.⁵³ The problem was finding the troops. Pitt had promised Loudoun 8,000 men but it was not clear where such force could be found. The continuing possibility of invasion made Cumberland particularly unhappy about sending so many men away, especially when plans were afoot to return the Hessians and Hanoverians to defend the Electorate. The Militia Bill was not yet on the statute-book and many doubted its effectiveness then. At the beginning of January, Loudoun was warned that, in spite of the ministerial promises, the reinforcement might yet be denied him.⁵⁴ In retaliation Pitt several times hinted that accommodation here would determine his willingness to help Hanover.⁵⁵

This situation led the administration to raise men from the clans formerly loyal to the Pretender. Similar proposals had been made by the Duke of Bedford during the previous war, but they had been dismissed as too dangerous. Even now many believed that it would simply arm men for the Stuarts.⁵⁶ However, in the absence of other suggestions, Pitt swept aside these objections. Two battalions were to be raised for service across the Atlantic under the supervision of the Duke of Argyle, the initial objective of the expedition being the fortress of Louisburg.⁵⁷

With regard to Germany, Pitt found that he had little option but to modify his views. It had been easy in opposition to suggest that Hanover might be compensated for any harm she suffered: that the treaties with Russia, Hesse and Prussia were unnecessary.⁵⁸ Once in office he found

⁵⁰ Hardy to Loudoun, 18 Sept 1756. Loudoun Papers, Box 41, Huntington Library.

⁵¹ Loudoun to Cumberland, 29 Aug, 2 Oct, 3 Oct 1756, printed in Pargellis (ed.), *Military Affairs*, 233-242.

⁵² Pownall to Loudoun, 7 Dec 1756, Loudoun Papers, Box 54.

⁵³ Monthly List and Progress of the Navy, 1 Jan 1757, Adm 7/567. See also the estimate in *JHC*, xxvii, 635. Accurate statistics, however, are hard to establish, as the compiler of the Monthly List Book noted.

⁵⁴ John Pownall to Loudoun, 8 Jan 1757, Loudoun Papers, Box 59.

⁵⁵ Pitt to Devonshire, 30 Jan 1757, DPC.

⁵⁶ Hardwicke to Newcastle, 6 Dec 1756, Yorke, II, 378.

⁵⁷ E. M. Lloyd, 'The Raising of the Highland Regiments in 1757', *English Historical Review*, xvii, 466-469. Calcraft to Loudoun, 7 Jan 1757, Loudoun Papers, Box 59.

⁵⁸ Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, II, 194.

himself looking at affairs from a very different perspective. Britain was at war with France; she required allies and had only one, Prussia. In these circumstances even Pitt realized that he had no choice but to accept the Convention of Westminster and make preparations for carrying out its provisions. Clearly next spring the French would cross the Rhine and attack Hanover as a preliminary to the destruction of Prussia. The previous administration had already begun discussions with Frederick II for a combined force to prevent this.⁵⁹ The ministry accordingly arranged for the return of the Hanoverians and Hessians, the whole army to be commanded by Cumberland. But no British troops would be sent and another concession to the new minister was that Hanover would finance its own troops, leaving only the Hessians and other mercenaries to be provided for. Nevertheless, the first action of Pitt when he appeared in the Commons after Christmas was to present a request for £200,000 so that the King could make good his commitments as Elector of Hanover.⁶⁰

These contradictions did not pass unnoticed. Lord Barrington at the War Office reported to Andrew Mitchell, the ambassador in Berlin: 'These measures as declared and explained by Pitt the first day of the session differ in nothing from those of the last administration. Every effort in America consistent with our safety at home, every effort at sea, and whatever this country can do besides, given the support of our allies on the Continent.'⁶¹ Holderness similarly found Pitt's 'opinions upon foreign affairs now he is in office... exactly the same with mine, however different they were some time ago'.⁶² Pitt later defended his change of heart over Germany by arguing that the arrangements with Prussia were 'dictated by Hanover, not Great Britain'. Under Pitt they had been subordinated to the interests of Britain and had become 'a millstone about the neck of France'.⁶³ These arguments were largely semantic and accepted as such, though one or two of Pitt's supporters found this cynical acceptance of measures previously condemned hard to accept. Richard Glover, playwright and admirer of Pitt, was especially scathing, castigating the actions of the new administration as being 'all within the old circle, trite, trifling and iniquitous'.⁶⁴

Such criticism was not entirely justified. Despite the lack of troops, Loudoun did get most of his reinforcement, the numbers being made up

⁵⁹ An Account of the Anglo-Prussian Correspondence after the Convention of Westminster, CP PRO 30/8/89 ff 148-160. Hanover, an Army in Readiness, 12 Sept 1756, Holderness Papers, Egerton, 3430 f 29, BL.

⁶⁰ Walpole, *Memoirs of George II*, II, 313. Clark, *Dynamics of Change*, 327-328.

⁶¹ Quoted in O. A. Sherrard, *Lord Chatham*, II, *Pitt and the Seven Years' War* (London, 1955), 172.

⁶² Holderness to Mitchell, 26 Nov 1756, printed in A. Bisset (ed.), *Memoirs and Papers of Sir Andrew Mitchell K.B., Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the Court of Great Britain to the Court of Prussia, 1756-1771* (London, 1850), I, 223.

⁶³ H. Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George III* (London, 1894), I, 82-83.

⁶⁴ R. Glover, *Memoirs of a Celebrated Literary and Political Character* (London, 1814), 104-106.

by six battalions from Ireland. With them went a squadron of twelve ships of the line to join the four already there, a formidable armament.⁶⁵ At the same time three ships of the line were sent under Captain Steevens to help the East India Company. This was especially desirable, since news had arrived that the French were similarly reinforcing their own navy there under the Comte d'Aché.⁶⁶

However, in terms of creating new resources, Glover was right. Little was effected. Among the Chatham correspondence is a paper detailing the naval forces necessary for 'the total Stagnation and Extirpation of the French Trade and Marine'.⁶⁷ No attempt was made to implement it. Temple's Board was content to order three new battleships and four frigates, hardly the vigorous start to shipbuilding claimed by one historian.⁶⁸ Indeed, Barrington correctly reported: 'The Admiralty change nothing in what they find to have been Lord Anson's plan.'⁶⁹ A total of 229 ships was to be in commission, an increase of just 20 on the previous year.⁷⁰ As to manning, the main contribution of the administration was the formation of thirty marine companies. Otherwise the manpower of the navy showed only modest growth.⁷¹ Additions to the army were equally limited. Except for the Highlanders, no new units were formed and the army was not expected to increase much beyond that envisaged by the previous government.⁷²

Most notable, however, was the failure of the government's financial measures. Legge calculated that the ministry required a supply of £8,500,000, of which £3,500,000 would have to be borrowed, £3,000,000 by the sale of annuities, £500,000 in a simple lottery.⁷³ The money should not have been difficult to secure, being less than that sought in the last year of the previous war. But Legge had insisted on some unorthodox methods to get his money. The new government was anxious to align the Tory gentry in its support, who had long been distrustful of the City. A frequent panacea of the Tories for curbing the financiers was the adoption of an 'open subscription'. By this method the public would be allowed to subscribe directly to any loan without going through the channel of the monied men. In theory more people would be able to participate at less cost to the

⁶⁵ Pitt to Loudoun, 4 Feb, 17 Mar 1757, WO 34/71.

⁶⁶ Corbett, *Seven Years' War*, I, 160, 338-340.

⁶⁷ List and Estimate of Vessels Required, 22 Aug 1756, CP PRO 30/8/78 f 76.

⁶⁸ B. Williams, *The Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (London, 1913), I, 295-296. The orders for new ships can be obtained from the Admiralty minutes in the Public Record Office, Adm 3/63.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Yorke, II, 362.

⁷⁰ Admiralty to the Navy Board, 26 Nov 1756, Adm 2/221.

⁷¹ Privy Council to the Admiralty, 1 Mar 1757, Adm 1/5164. Seamen Employed, 1756, *JHC*, xxvii, 844. Seamen Employed, 1757, *JHC*, xxviii, 128.

⁷² Partly because of recruitment for and reliance on the militia: Western, *English Militia*, 104-145.

⁷³ L. S. Sutherland, 'The City of London and the Pitt-Devonshire Administration, 1756-1757', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLVI, 148-193.

government, since there would be no need for the intermediary services of the City.⁷⁴ However, Legge forgot that he had no network of correspondents for selling the stock and the results of his experimentation were singularly unfortunate. Only a tenth of the money required on the loan was forthcoming, while the lottery part was not much more successful. Scarcely half the tickets were sold.⁷⁵

III

These setbacks not surprisingly made the political atmosphere uncertain. Even before the ministry was formed, Fox had forecast that Pitt would be foolish to act without the support of Newcastle or himself and without the confidence of the King.⁷⁶ By March 1757 it was clear how accurate he had been. Pitt had built his administration on sand, not rock. Leicester House and the Grenville family were numerically too small and the Tories too unreliable a basis on which to build a government. Without the confidence of the King, they had no prospect of building a stable majority in the Commons. Even by Christmas Pitt had come to realize that he needed more support and that meant some kind of understanding with Newcastle.⁷⁷

Another reason for the weakness of the ministry was Pitt's ill health. He was stricken with gout just after taking office and it was February before he reappeared in the Commons. Commissions remained unsigned and business was 'greatly retarded'. Holderness told Mitchell: 'Many cool thinking people who were once so partial to Pitt' were now discovering 'how unequal he is to the task'.⁷⁸ A further problem was his inability to win friends in Parliament. Here Pitt was his own worst enemy. To be an effective leader it was necessary to greet the members with a jocular phrase or courteous salutation. Rhetoric could cajole but hardly endear. As Fox once crudely said, there were times when it was necessary to 'tickle the palm rather than the ear'. In the details of patronage Pitt had no interest. Its effective disposal was another reason why he needed Newcastle.

The latter meanwhile found that, notwithstanding Minorca, his political star continued to shine as brightly as ever. Hardwicke recorded that he had been 'more visited and had greater professions of attachment to him than when he had been at the head of the Treasury'.⁷⁹ This might seem surprising, since historians – until recently – have been quick to dismiss Newcastle as incompetent, devious, malicious and corrupt. It has usually been overlooked that the source for most of these charges is the letters and

⁷⁴ P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (London, 1967), 226–229.

⁷⁵ Sutherland, 'City of London', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLVI, 166–168, 172.

⁷⁶ Fox to Sackville, 4 Nov 1756, HMC, Appendix to the Ninth Report, Part III, 10.

⁷⁷ Clark, *Dynamics of Change*, 302–335.

⁷⁸ Holderness to Mitchell, 4 Mar 1757, Holderness Papers, Egerton, 3460 f 193.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Yorke, II, 361.