THE PAXTON DISTURBANCE AND IDEAS OF ORDER IN PENNSYLVANIA POLITICS

By James E. Crowley*

THROUGHOUT the French and Indian War, constitutional disputes between the Proprietor and the Assembly had repeatedly stalled supply bills in Pennsylvania, resulting in a weak frontier defense that subjected the inhabitants of the western part of the colony to frequent Indian attacks. Pontiac's Rebellion in the summer of 1763 led to further incursions, and many frontiersmen complained that the provincial government had not provided enough protection. In December some inhabitants of the towns of Paxton and Donegal in Lancaster County took matters into their own hands. To remove suspected spies from the interior of the province they killed twenty Indians, six at the Conestoga Manor and the rest at the Lancaster workhouse, where the sheriff had placed them for their protection.

Officials in Philadelphia reacted sharply upon hearing of the event. Lieutenant Governor John Penn issued a proclamation denouncing the murderers and urging that the men who committed the "outrageous act" be brought to justice. The Assembly likewise stated that it would "provide for the Expence of removing and maintaining such of these unhappy People as have escaped the Fury of the above-mentioned lawless Party." The Assembly's statement referred to 140 Indians whom the government in November had moved from the Moravian missions at Nain, Wechquetank, and Wyaliushing to Province Island near Philadelphia for their own and the colony's protection. Immediately after the incident at Lancaster, however, men in the western counties began to consider giving similar treatment to the Moravian Indians. In early February 1764 a group of over five hundred men from the west set out for Philadelphia with vague intentions of killing the

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† Pennsylvania Archives, Eighth Series (Harrisburg, 1931-1935), VI, 5493, 5497, hereinafter cited as Votes of Assembly.
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In response to this threat the Assembly and the Governor acted with unaccustomed speed and cooperation in military and financial matters. At the Governor's request, the Assembly quickly passed a bill for public defense and extended the British Riot Act of 1715. A barricade was thrown up around the Indian barracks, and many townspeople, among them a large number of Quakers, began to arm themselves, but no battle took place. Representatives of the Council and the Assembly met the frontiersmen at German-town; there they worked out an agreement whereby the frontiersmen would return home while two of their representatives presented a petition of grievances to the Governor and the Assembly. The killings and the subsequent march on Philadelphia constituted the Paxton Rebellion.

Previous studies of the Paxton disturbance have argued that its chief historical importance lay in its demonstration of the democratic political views of the inhabitants of the rural and frontier sections of Pennsylvania. According to this interpretation, the Paxtonians' petition showed that "the fundamental grievance of the backcountry was inadequate representation." The westerners objected to the political situation in Pennsylvania, where government "operated in the interests of a sectional minority," but this control by "eastern aristocrats . . . could not be maintained indefinitely in a land of growing democracy." Because it stemmed from differences between the politically dominant figures of the "urban and commercial east" and the people of "the rural and agricultural west," the Paxton disturbance had "the appearance of a people's movement against the rule of a small oligarchy." If this interpretation is accurate, then "the march of the Paxton Boys paved the way for internal revolution." One account of these events states that "it is not too extreme to see the Paxton

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2 Ibid., 5536; Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1852), IX, 108, hereinafter cited as Colonial Records.

3 Brooke Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, III (October, 1946), 461-486; Francis Parkman, The Conspiracy of Pontiac, and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada (6th ed., Boston, 1874), II, 115-156; and John R. Dunbar, ed., The Paxton Papers (The Hague, 1957), 3-47, provide accounts of the events related to the Paxton affair. The last work is a collection of many of the most important contemporary pamphlets and other writings about the affair.
resolutions as a primary statement in the war for rights and representation which burgeoned into the Revolution.4

This interpretation depends on two assumptions: that when westerners oppose easterners they do so in the name of democratic ideals, and similarly that the frontiersmen's demand for increased representation in the Assembly was their primary concern. The metaphysical association of the frontier with democratic ideals is, as a number of historians have suggested, anachronistic in the colonial context, but the demand of the Paxtonians for more representation in the Assembly has not, previously, been seen in relation to the westerners' other demands and ideas.3

The Paxtonians actually presented two petitions to the government, and they differed in significant ways. The first statement by the frontiersmen was a justification of their purposes in marching to Philadelphia. This "Declaration" was drawn up before the group reached Germantown; they gave it to several clergymen who had visited them in an effort to dissuade them from entering Philadelphia.6 The "Declaration" admitted that their recent actions bore "an Appearance of flying in the Face of Authority," which "nothing but Necessity itself could induce us to." They considered themselves to be loyal subjects of the King, and they claimed that their recent actions protected the inhabitants from "his Majesty's cloaked Enemies." These enemies included the 140 Indians who were still under the protective cloak of the government in Philadelphia. Such an unfortunate situation was possible only because "a certain Faction," the Quakers, had gotten "the political Reigns in their Hand and tamely tyrannize over the other good Subjects of the Province."7 There was no mention

6 The "Declaration" was delivered separately to Governor Penn, but it was combined with the "Remonstrance" in its first appearance in pamphlet form. "A Declaration and Remonstrance Of the distressed and bleeding Frontier Inhabitants Of the Province of Pennsylvania, Presented by them to the Honourable the Governor and Assembly of the Province, Shewing the Causes of their late Discontent and Uneasiness and the Grievances Under which they have laboured, and which they humbly pray to have redress'd," Paxton Papers, 99-110. See Leonard W. Labaree, ed., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven, 1967), 80-81 n., for the dating of the petitions.
7 "Declaration and Remonstrance," 101, 103-104.
of inadequate representation or any other direct complaint about political matters in this petition; their basic concern, apparently, was with the danger that the western inhabitants faced from the Indians.8

In contrast to the “Declaration,” the second petition, a “Re
monstrance” drawn up by Matthew Smith and James Gibson—the two representatives left behind by the marchers—and the statement most frequently used by historians of the Paxton affair as an index to western grievances, began with a complaint about their unequal political status: “WE apprehend,” the petition said, “that as Free-Men and English Subjects, we have an indisputable Title to the same Privileges and Immunities with his Majesty’s other subjects, who reside in the interior Counties of Philadelphia, Chester, and Bucks, and therefore ought not be excluded from an equal Share with them in the very important Privilege of Legislation.”9 Instead of the total of ten places in the Assembly apportioned to the counties of Lancaster, York, Cumberland, Berks, and Northampton, the petitioners claimed that they deserved a number more nearly equal to the twenty-six places of the three eastern counties and the city of Philadelphia. With the exception of this complaint about inadequate representation, the content of the “Remonstrance” was similar to that of the “Declaration.” It sought to justify the frontiersmen’s actions and complained about Quaker handling of the Indian problem. In comparison with the “Declaration,” however, the form of the “Remonstrance” was noticeably more legalistic and its tone more subdued. For an expression of democratic unhappiness with aristocratic rule, the “Remonstrance” was surprisingly deferential: it indicated to the Governor and Assembly that “the Inhabitants of the Frontier Counties of Lancaster, York, Cumberland, Berks, and Northampton, humbly beg leave to remonstrate, and to lay before you, the following Grievances, which we submit to your

8William S. Hanna has described the apolitical nature of most of the people in the west: “Without political organization, direction, or much political consciousness, the settlers in the West . . . had needed time to focus their grievances upon some object. . . . The massacre of these Indians and the destruction of their settlements was an act of violent protest that had been long in coming, and it reflected the settlers’ inability to make their discontent felt in lawful political action through their legislature.” Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics (Stanford, 1964), 149.

9“Declaration and Remonstrance,” 105.
Wisdom for Redress." Part of the explanation for the differences between the two petitions may be that Gibson and Smith received assistance in drafting the "Remonstrance" while they were in Philadelphia. They had asked Benjamin Franklin for such help, but "persons more suitable to their purposes" did so instead.

The circumstances of the demand for more representation—the fact that the grievance appeared only in the second petition and the possibility that sympathetic supporters in the city may have suggested it to Smith and Gibson, who added the demand to the general list of grievances after the Paxtonians had dispersed—would seem to be shaky ground on which to base an interpretation of the incident as fundamentally a democratic revolt. There had not been any significant complaints from the western counties about inadequate representation previously, and, as Theodore Thayer has shown, western representatives showed little disposition to oppose the policies of the dominant "Quaker" part in the Assembly. Rather, they were in many cases closely allied to the Quakers, and electoral behavior over the previous decade could suggest that an increase in representation would merely have strengthened the group already in power. In Lancaster County, where the massacres took place, there was greater political stability than in any other county in Pennsylvania. In the ten elections from 1758 to 1767, only six different men had shared the county's four seats. Two of them, Emanuel Carpenter and Isaac Saunders, were justices of the peace and therefore firm supporters of the Proprietor, and the other delegates were adherents of the Quaker party. None of them can be thought of as a spokesman for democratic dissent on the frontier. Although there was more competition for the one or two seats in each of the four other frontier counties, there was still remarkable stability. Given

Ibid.  
12 James Pemberton to John Fothergill, 7 March 1764, quoted in Hindle, 482.  
14 Votes of Assembly, VI, 4886, 5068, 5157, 5280, 5367; VII, 5669, 5789, 5938, 6062, gives the election returns at the start of each Assembly session during this period.  
15 Thayer, Growth of Democracy, 92.  
16 During this period York had two seats and elected five men, Cumberland had two seats and elected five men, Berks had one seat and elected five men, and Northampton had one seat and elected four men.
such political behavior, the most understandable motives for the Paxtonians' rebellion were just what they claimed them to be: unhappiness with the inadequate border defense against the Indians, and resentment of the general neglect of their interests by the government. Neither of these complaints resulted necessarily in a desire for active participation in government.

Though there are strong reasons to doubt the validity of the interpretation of the Paxton revolt as a democratic movement, the incident laid bare fundamental social differences between the rebellious westerners and political leaders in the east, who temporarily put aside their political wrangling and made common cause against the Paxtonians. The history of the Paxton affair tells less about ideological differences over the merits of democracy than about the ways in which men understood the basic function of politics. It also indicated social tensions, which, though strong and almost impossible to resolve, were removed from the political arena except during times of crisis and acute insecurity. The Paxton affair further indicated that the established political institutions for compromise and reconciliation were ineffective when these social tensions influenced political activity. In normal circumstances social tensions were not given articulate expression, but in times of crisis the basic social and political attitudes of different groups became clearly evident as men sought to justify and understand their unaccustomed actions. The key to understanding the Paxton rebellion may lie in the nature of this social differentiation, which shaped the misunderstandings between the two groups about the proper function of government.

The Paxton disturbance made clear for the first time that the people of the backcountry felt a profound sense of alienation from the rest of the province. The government, they were convinced, simply did not understand their problems or answer their needs. When the horrors of the Indian raids came to the frontier settlements, "the Men in Power refused to relieve the Sufferings of their fellow Subjects"—a fact which persuaded many of them

34Richard Maxwell Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), especially 13-37, gives a good analysis of the social fragmentation that could exist in the backcountry and describes the differences between the governmental needs of the frontier and those of a more highly structured society.
that the Indians were not their only enemies. The Quaker policy of protecting “His Majesty’s perfidious Enemies” at public expense, “while our suffering Brethren on the Frontiers are almost destitute of the Necessaries of Life and are neglected by the Public” seemed unjustifiable. The people, an Anglican minister in Lancaster wrote, had a right to demand and receive protection, and a government that ignored their grievances spurned the example of the “PARLIAMENTS OF GREAT BRITAIN... the grand Barriers of our LIBERTY.”

Nearly everyone in western Pennsylvania hated Indians and thought that they should be removed from the white settlements, at least during wartime. Because of their “Murdering and Destroying defenceless People,” the Indians were thought to be “Wolflike.” The settlers considered periods of Indian troubles as general states of war with all Indians. From their point of view the massacres were less a matter involving violations of the law than an act of war, albeit a war not declared against the particular Indians who were killed. The westerners thought it was unrealistic to distinguish between friendly and hostile Indians: “We have not better Evidence that any particular Tribe or Nation of Indians have been at War with us, than that all the Indians that lived amongst us were also our Enemies.” Because of their opportunities for acting as spies and suppliers for overtly hostile Indians, “the Indians that lived as independent Commonwealths among us or near our Borders were our most dangerous Enemies.” Leaders in the western counties viewed the actions of the Paxtonians with mixed sentiments. The killings at Conestoga and Lancaster were clearly illegal, but they thought that prolonged experience with Indian savagery had provoked the frontiersmen’s extreme response and the provocation should have excused them from severe punishment.

John Ewing wrote that most

38 “Declaration and Remonstrance,” 108.
40 “An Historical Account, of the late Disturbance, between the Inhabitants of the Back Settlements; of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphians,” ibid., 128.
42 [Barton], “Conduct of the Paxton-Men,” 269.
people in the west thought that the Indians at Conestoga and Lancaster had got what they deserved.\textsuperscript{23} There were also religious as well as social sanctions for killing Indians. Some Presbyterians considered Indians to be agents of the devil, or at least murderous heathens against whom they could bring down righteous vengeance. According to this view, the Quakers took "the part of bloody Cain" against their white brothers by aiding the Indians.\textsuperscript{24} These ideas had the support of local churchmen: John Elder, John Steel, and Andrew Bay, prominent Presbyterian clergymen in the western counties, took active parts in frontier defense and sympathized with the Paxtonians. Christian solidarity and self-defense, two values fundamental to frontier life, assured men that by killing dangerous Indians they were preserving the society's well-being.

The westerners thought that they endured unnecessary dangers because the government paid more attention to the safety and welfare of the Indians than to that of the white settlers. Because of their hatred for and fear of the Indians, the people of the backcountry were strongly resentful of the government's apparent policy of appeasement. Such a policy could only "awaken the Resentment of a People grossly abused, unrighteously burthened, and made Dupes and Slaves to Indians."\textsuperscript{25} The "Remonstrance" claimed that "it grieves us to the very Heart, to see such of our Frontier Inhabitants as have escaped from savage Fury . . . left destitute by the Public, and exposed to the most cruel Poverty and Wretchedness" while at the same time the government carefully protected 140 of the King's enemies.\textsuperscript{26}

At first the westerners had found it hard to believe that the government was not going to come to their assistance, but finally it became apparent that the Quakers' policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Indians was part of a selfish and pernicious plot against their liberties. Instead of acting in the interest of the entire province, the petition declared, a faction led by Israel Pemberton had "found Means to enslave the Province to Indians."\textsuperscript{27} In addition to encouraging the Indians, the Quaker fac-

\textsuperscript{23} John Ewing to Joseph Reed, February 1764, printed in Parkman, Conspiracy of Pontiac, II, 351.
\textsuperscript{24} "The Cloven-Foot discovered," Paxton Papers, 86.
\textsuperscript{25} "Declaration and Remonstrance," 104.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 104.
tion endangered the inhabitants' liberties by "their unjustifiable Usurpation, their thirst for Power, their Want of the Principles of Justice & the common Feelings of human Nature for the distressed." Because they believed that the primary function of government was to protect the interests of the governed, the Paxtonians thought that it was entirely contrary to such principles to aid the society's chief enemies.

The westerners were especially alienated from the provincial government because they believed that the Quakers, whose Indian policy was notoriously lenient, dominated it. The Quakers appeared to be chiefly interested in the sale of their western land and the Indian trade, not the protection of the province as a whole. The mildest attacks on the Quakers declared that they should have no part in governing the province. The attempts of the Friendly Association, under the leadership of Israel Pemberton, to maintain peace with the Indians through private diplomacy were a defiance of government and harmful to the society because they made the Pennsylvanians seem to be "weak and disunited People." John Elder described the anger of the westerners:

> the minds of the Inhabitants are so exasperated against a particular set of men, deeply concerned in the government, for the singular regards they have always shown to savages, and the heavy burdens by their means laid on the province in maintaining an extensive Trade and holding Treaties from time to time with the savages, without any prospect of advantage either to his Majesty or to the province, how beneficial soever it may have been to individuals.

The Paxtonians considered their actions as attempts to ease the burden of provincial defense and as remedies for the dangerous consequences of the Quakers' policy of appeasement with the Indians. Their motivation involved social not political frustrations.

A lack of confidence in ordinary means of communication was one of the westerners' explanations of the motivation for their desperate activities. They believed that conditions in the old and new parts of Pennsylvania were so different that people in Phila-

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30 The Reverend Elder to Colonel Shippen, 1 February 1764, printed in Parkman, Conspiracy of Pontiac, II, 347.
Philadelphia would have difficulty in understanding the westerners' problems. Apprehensions of the corruption and sophistication of city life contributed to the westerners' distrust of the Quakers. The Quakers had learned to keep "A great appearance of true Piety," and so "Outward Sanctity is made A Cloak for all the Quaker Trade." In the city, singularity to most people's apprehension stands in the place of merit." The Quaker, "with his singularity of dress, self-sufficient behavior, laconic style, and air of riches," was especially skilled in these matters: "the apparent probity and power of selling cheap because wealthy, create him business; men in the country are desirous of talking with such a man, and thus deal with him from that singularity in him, and that whimsical disposition in themselves." Because "the people in and around Philadelphia" were absorbed in living "a pleasant, protected life," they "had no feelings for the great need and tribulation which the poor settlers on the frontier had to endure." The affluence of the easterners allowed them to be indifferent to "Savage Indians," who had taken over white men's land, and "who were at this Time rioting in all the Plenty that so great and Fertile a Province could afford.

In demanding a remedy to their grievances, the Paxtonians appealed to their rights as "Free-Men and English Subjects" to an equal share in the colony's legislature. Despite this concern with violations of their rights, however, personal grievances about immediate problems, not political ideals or constitutional principles, shaped their demands for an end to Quaker rule. Considered from their own point of view, the Paxtonians attacked the Indians in order to provide themselves with the advantages they expected from a properly functioning government.

The westerners nominally shared certain political conceptions with men in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. Both groups held that the purpose of government was to protect their rights as Englishmen. But in fact men in the east and the west had different

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32 "A Battle! A Battle! A Battle of Squirt, Where no Man is kill'd And no Man is hurt!" Paxton Papers, 180, 178.
33 A Letter from Batista Angelon, who resided many years in London, to his friend Mansoni (Ephrata, 1764), 4.
35 "An Historical Account, of the late Disturbance," 128.
36 "Declaration and Remonstrance," 105.
ideas about the proper duties and form for government. In the opinion of the Paxtonians, people usually fulfilled their part in society simply by conducting themselves as loyal and peaceful citizens. For example, the epigraphs on the Paxtonians' pamphlets revealed a preference on the one hand for withdrawal from the corruptions of politics and on the other a sense of the obligation to oppose tyranny even if the law must be violated. Two such epigraphs dealt with the pseudo-Catos popular in eighteenth-century America. One quoted from Joseph Addison's *Cato* that

> When Vice prevails and impious Men bear Sway,  
> The Post of Honour is a private Station.\(^5^6\)

The other quotation took a pointed lesson from John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's *Cato Letters*:

> Those Nations who are governed in Spite of themselves,  
> and in a Manner that bids Defiance to their Opinions,  
> their Interests, and their Understandings,—are either SLAVES, or will soon cease to be SUBJECTS.\(^5^7\)

The Paxtonians' attitudes toward politics alternated from apathy to rebelliousness; with their unsophisticated understanding of political institutions, they tended to call the whole legitimacy of government into question when they were discontented.

Unaware of the implication of their acts, they insisted that despite their momentary neglect of authority, they remained loyal to the King; they had acted only in response to threats to their birthrights. They believed that they had always manifested "their Allegiance and Loyalty to their most gracious Sovereign King GEORGE, whom they have ever esteemed as the kind and careful Father of his People."\(^5^8\) Their declarations of allegiance almost always referred to the King rather than to the governor or the legislature of the province. The local institutions of government appeared largely irrelevant to their problems. Nonetheless, a defender of the "Declaration and Remonstrance" believed that the petitions showed "that the Frontier Inhabitants have been both

\(^5^6\) [David James Dove], "The Quaker Unmask'd: Or, Plain Truth: Humbly address'd to the Consideration of all the Freemen of Pennsylvania," *Paxton Papers*, 205.

\(^5^7\) [Barton], "Conduct of the Paxton-Men," 267.

\(^5^8\) *Ibid.*, 271.
loyal and peaceable Members of Society”; once their “real Grievances” were removed and “plain Justice” was done, “the People will be as quiet and peaceable Members of the Community as heretofore.” Because their interest focused primarily on what Pennsylvania’s government achieved, rather than on its institutional and constitutional nature, they could look benignly on temporary violations of its political institutions.

While acknowledging the close relationship between their English liberties and the maintenance of order, the Paxtonians did not think of the role of either government or law as an extensive one. When they referred to the functions of government, they usually meant matters of the executive, especially defense. Their notion of the enjoyment of “charter privileges” was the ability “to exert the natural strength of this province in support of his Majesty’s dominions whenever danger threatens.” They had a high regard for their “most gracious King and his officers,” for whom they “would gladly pour out their possessions and their blood . . . but they would not wage war against their own suffering fellow citizens for the sake of the Quakers and Moravians and their creatures or instruments, the double-dealing Indians.” They conceived of both government and law as substitutes for self-defense in a literal and immediate sense. They mentioned few specific rights besides “the first great Law of Nature,” which was self-preservation; otherwise, they only made vague allusions to the importance of English liberties. The Paxtonians held that the preservation of order was highly desirable and were confident that their individual interests were in accord with this order. Specifically, the proper social order for them was equivalent to physical security; there was no particular concern with the form of the government or the content of the laws so long as these did not jeopardize their interests. In matters like dealing with dangerous Indians, “life and reason were set at defiance.” Because of their dangerous situation, they saw political problems as immediate crises; their chief desire was for

20 “The Quaker Unmask’d,” 215
21 “Declaration and Remonstrance,” 102.
23 Notebook of . . . Muhlenberg, 97.
24 [Barton], “Conduct of the Paxton-Men,” 275.
25 The Reverend Mr. Elder to Governor Penn, 27 December 1763, printed in Parkman, Conspiracy of Pontiac, II, 345.
“safety and protection.” Consequently, when the government failed in its narrow but crucial function of providing defense, the frontiersmen felt that the preservation of order devolved upon the individuals who needed protection: the protection of the Indians “while our suffering Brethren on the Frontier are almost destitute of the Necessaries of Life and are neglected by the Public, is sufficient to make us mad with Rage, and tempt us to do what nothing but the most violent Necessity can vindicate.”

The Paxtonians conceived of the function of politics as a handling of immediate practical problems; the idea that government had a constant duty to regulate the workings of society through law was too sophisticated for them, because at their level of social development it had little relevance. When the law was a hindrance to their aims or actually endangered their existence, they were willing to disregard it or interpret it in a favorable way. Despite the explicit protection which the provincial government had extended to the Conestoga Indians, the Paxtonians were confident:

that it will not be disputed but that if the Conestogoe Indians were in Confederacy with our open Enemies . . . they were as much Enemies as any other Tribe of Indians on the Continent . . . & that their aggravated Perfidy justly exposed them to an aggravated Destruction.

They believed that the formalities of law were satisfied if they presented affidavits that established the guilt of the slain Indians after the killings had taken place. Because of the inability of the government to protect the public interest, the Paxton Boys killed twenty Indians, who were supposedly under the protection of the magistrates, and they would have killed more if it had been possible. The Paxtonians decided for themselves that the provincial arrangements for the trial of Indians were meant “only to provide for the Trial of Murderers in a Time of Peace.”

Since real authority had to be lawful, it could not perform duties contrary to law. To act in a way that positively endangered the interests of the members of society was precisely contrary to the purpose of government, which was to protect the interests of

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45 Barton], “Conduct of the Paxton-Men,” 279.
46 “Declaration and Remonstrance,” 108.
48 Ibid., 201.
the inhabitants: "For there is no Power in any Government to protect its Enemies, that is, to ruin itself." Protecting enemies of society was unlawful, and therefore, in killing people whom the government protected, the Paxtonians had themselves done nothing unlawful or in violation of authority. They were, in fact, proud of what they considered to be patriotic activities, and they thought "all well disposed people entertain a charitable Sentiment of those, who at their own great Expence and Trouble, have attempted, or shall attempt rescuing a labouring Land from a Weight so oppressive, unreasonable and unjust."

The revolutionary implications of such reasoning were perhaps no more significant than the conservative frame of mind indicated. While the Paxtonians were willing to take authority into their own hands in extreme situations, at no point did they argue in favor of a consistently anti-authoritarian position. For though they felt competent to judge for themselves whether an act was lawful or not and felt justified in acting upon that decision, they believed that their actions preserved the essential order and principles of the society. Society, as they conceived it, was basically atomistic, and the desired ends as well as the means of their action were individualistic. The social order was both tenuous and superficial; immediate, individual welfare had priority in value over the needs of society as a whole.

The westerners' simple view of social relations was inapplicable to conditions in Philadelphia. In comparison with rural Pennsylvania, its social structure was more elaborate and its institutions more varied. Its large population and extensive commercial relations made it one of the most important cities in the British empire. The American Philosophical Society, the College of Pennsylvania, and the Library Company provided ample opportunity for social and intellectual activity by the prominent men in the province. More than any other town in the British colonies in America, Philadelphia could claim to be "civilized," and its inhabitants were proud of its achievements.

Ibid., 202.
"Declaration and Remonstrance," 104.
Even the political contests between the Assembly and the Proprietor were unusually sophisticated, operating within a framework of established constitutional principles. What the frontiersmen mistook for Quaker opposition to military measures during the French and Indian War could also be described as a constitutional dispute between the Governor and the Assembly over the proper way to raise revenue.\(^5\) Political leaders in Philadelphia lived at an entirely different level of social development from that of the frontier. The greater complexity of eastern Pennsylvania's society required different governmental functions from those in the west. Philadelphians felt that government should deal with problems along established lines rather than on an ad hoc basis. Owing to their concern for the effect of individuals' actions on institutions, procedure and protocol were important matters for them.

Consequently, when Governor Penn was faced with the responsibility for organizing the city in its defense against the Paxtonians, he refused to act in an unorthodox fashion despite the emergency. "At the same time that I wish to preserve these poor creatures by all the means in my power," he stated to the Assembly, "I would not in the Orders I give for that end, be guilty of the least infraction of the Laws."\(^6\) In order to assure strict legality in the matter, he requested and received the Assembly's extension of the Riot Act to Pennsylvania. Similarly, Penn later thought that it would be "unbecoming the Honor and Dignity of the Government" for the governor and the Assembly to meet jointly with the petitioners. Proper constitutional procedure indicated that the justice of their petition was a matter "for the Consideration of the Representative Body of the people."\(^7\) Violations of the correct political form were a danger to society because they weakened the established system of legality on which the social order depended. It is not surprising that the colonial leaders, with their view of society as an intricately organized being, came to see social order as an end in itself.

The province's leaders shared the Paxtonians' idea that the public good was roughly equivalent to the protection of each man's rights, but they insisted that these liberties were meaningless unless

\(^6\) Votes of Assembly, VII, 5536.
\(^7\) Colonial Records, IX, 147.
a man understood that he depended on society for his well-being. One writer described this mutual dependence in terms of the traditional analogy of the body and society:

The inhabitants of this Province, and under this Government, are a body Corporate, which body composes a Society in civil Government, and every Loyal Person, a real Member of that Society. Thus we are bound together by Unanimity and Concord, under the sanction of Laws, to support our civil and Religious Rights in Government: And we are not to be disturbed in this happy Situation, but by a failure in one, or more of the Members; and this appears in every Person, that acts contrary to the system of Laws, by which this body Corporate is formed into a Society.  

A man's liberty required an ordered context, otherwise it degenerated into licentiousness.

Because of their concern with the preservation of an established social order, the political leaders at Philadelphia viewed the killings in terms that differed on almost every count from those of the westerners. The Paxtonians, in meting out private justice, had denied the value of impartial justice, one of the basic conditions of civilized society: "It is a fundamental law of all Civil Government," a critic of the Paxtonians wrote, "that no Person shall put another to death by his own authority." In Lockean terms, the Paxtonians threatened to return Pennsylvania to a state of nature. Governor Penn pointed out to William Johnson that the rioters endangered themselves as well as others, for they had "set themselves above, & violated those very Laws under which they themselves derive the Rights of Security & Protection." The Assembly agreed with Penn about the severity of the threat to Pennsylvania's government; it urged him to direct "a vigorous exertion of power, which can never be more properly employed than in vindicating the Honour and Dignity of a Government, enforcing an

55 "An Answer, To The Pamphlet Entituled the Conduct of the Paxton Men, impartially represented: Wherein the ungenerous Spirit of the Author is Manifested, &. And the spotted Garment pluckt off," Paxton Papers, 325.
56 "A Serious Address, to Such of the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, As have cannived at, or do approve of, the late Massacre of the Indians at Lancaster," ibid., 93.
57 A Letter from the Governor to Sir William Johnson, 31 December 1763, Colonial Records, IX, 106.
Obedience to the Laws, and repressing the dangerous insolence of tumultuous Insurgents; who, guided by a blind Rage, undertake by open force to control the conduct of the Administration, and counteract the best concerted measures for the General Good."58

Among these measures were the diplomatic relations with the Indians. Far from sharing the westerners' belief that all Indians were enemies, the public spokesmen in the east were always careful to distinguish between friendly and unfriendly Indians. After the massacre, Penn wrote of the Conestogas: "I conceived they were as much under the protection of the Government, and its laws, as any others amongst us."59 In the summer of 1764, when the Paxtonians' demand for a bounty on Indian scalps was met, the Governor was careful to insist that the Six Nations and certain other friendly Indians under the protection of the government were excluded; no such discrimination was evident in the original request of the "Remonstrance."60

The various leaders at Philadelphia united from December to early February—the period in which the Paxtonians posed a physical threat—in viewing the disturbance as a danger to the well-being of the colony. There was a fear that the lawless conduct of the frontiersmen towards the Indians would affect the welfare of the entire province. The Paxtonians' killings had already endangered the peace with the Six Nations. Sir William Johnson warned Governor Penn that "the friendly Indians in these parts may be induced to doubt our faith and sincerity towards themselves, from the unhappy fate of our late Friends in Pennsylvania, which will cause them to expect the same treatment whenever it is in our power to destroy them." In addition, there would be an erosion of established authority in Pennsylvania if they went unpunished.61

In the opinion of the easterners, the men of the backcountry had invoked licentiousness in the name of liberty. Owing to the leaders' belief that the established institutions of government were the only secure means for the long-term regulation of society, the rioters' disrespect towards the provincial government's dignity

58 Ibid., 124.
59 Votes of Assembly, VII, 5493.
60 Colonial Records, IX, 191.
61 Ibid., 130, 106.
and functions necessarily seemed to be a renunciation of the order existing in Pennsylvania. Public spokesmen in Philadelphia claimed to identify society’s interests with their own, and they believed that the preservation of their personal liberties depended on the maintenance of law. According to these beliefs, a man who did not make his interests conform with those of the society was a threat to the liberties of other men. The Paxtonians provided a clear example of such threats in their slaying of people who were under the protection of the government. Such disregard for the rights of others was an act of licentiousness.

To men involved with framing and executing laws, the frontiersmen’s tendency to determine for themselves the applicability of laws to particular situations seemed to imperil the entire structure of government. Governor Penn noted in his proclamation calling for the arrest of the rioters that the liberty and security of individuals and the government depended on the preservation of the rule of law. Samuel Foulke, a Quaker Assemblyman from Bucks County, expressed a widespread sentiment when he said that the effects of an intentional legal violation extended beyond the immediate crime: he wrote that such acts show “Contempt of all Laws, Divine, Moral, Civil, and Military,” because they denied any ordering principle. A pamphleteer argued that to condone the actions of the Paxtonians was to admit “the whole System, or Body of Laws, which support civil Society, and bindeth the Body corporate, as with Chains of Iron, to be a mere Fandom or useless Ceremony.” In order to preserve the dignity of the laws, the violators had to be punished. The magistrates simply could not allow the frontiersmen to act solely with a regard for their selfish interests in violation of the law and the interests of others that it protected.

Men with political power in Pennsylvania also feared that the Paxtonians might try to bring about a change in the colony’s government. Indeed, historians have interpreted the Paxton affair as essentially a popular movement for greater representation in Pennsylvania’s government, and there was a contemporary basis for this claim. But as seen above, the frontiersmen’s motives were

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Ibid., 107.

"Fragment of a Journal kept by Samuel Foulke, of Bucks County, while a member of the Colonial Assembly of Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, V (1881), 70.

"An Answer, To The Pamphlet Entitled the Conduct of the Paxton Men," 326.
more specific; they were unhappy with the inadequate border defense and the government's neglect of their interests. Nonetheless, men in positions of authority thought that the Paxtonians, in addition to their disrespect for the province's laws, had intended to use the government for their own purposes. The provincial leaders considered disorderly conduct on a large scale to be one of the gravest possible threats to a society. Tumults and mobs were dangerous because they combined power with irresponsible and irrational action. Such activity could have far-reaching effects beyond the immediate confusion. If a government was too lenient, it provided an opportunity for "the unprecedented and lawless proceedings of an ignorant and enthusiastick Mob." There was no natural limit or sane purpose to such unchecked power.

According to this understanding, the worst elements in men tended to take hold of them in such circumstances, and, as the lower sort of men always needed someone to follow, ambitious men could exploit the situation by organizing a faction for their own subversive motives. Men who lacked a concern for the public good sought to take advantage of situations of unrest for their own aggrandizement; it is notable that easterners thought that few of the rioters "were Freeholders or Men of Property, the majority of them being people the Caballers had in pay." The leaders of the Paxtonians had led them astray; they sought "nothing more than the Distraction of God's People, by ushering into their Minds, Vice, Immorality, Hatred, Envy, Evil speaking, bitterness of Heart and a Perpetual dislike to all other religious Societies." Factions, more than the tumults themselves, posed the greatest threat to the proper interests of the society because they were by nature a disordering influence; they could rise to power only through disregard of the law.

The political leaders in the colony were not afraid that the frontiersmen would come to power through orderly means; rather they feared that some ambitious men would take advantage of the

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65 "Remarks on The Quaker Unmask'd; Or Plain Truth found to be Plain Falshood: Humbly address'd to the Candid," Paxton Papers, 225.
66 "The Quaker Vindicated; Or, Observations On A Late Pamphlet, Entitled, The Quaker Unmask'd, Or, Plain Truth," ibid., 235.
tumultuous circumstances following the Paxton disturbance to secure illegal power. The leaders were confident that in a stable situation the people would continue to elect them to office, since it was their recognized duty to govern the colony. Designing men, however, might seek to upset this order by encouraging anarchy. The faction most often suspected of having a part in the Paxton affair was that of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, whom many Pennsylvania leaders, especially those in the Quaker-influenced Assembly, associated by habit of mind with lawless behavior. Anglicans and Tories thought that the Presbyterians were still Cromwellian in spirit, while the Quakers remembered their persecution at the hands of fellow-dissenters in Boston. A new wave of Scotch-Irish immigrants had been arriving in Pennsylvania since 1760, and easterners associated the newcomers with the troubles and complaints of the backcountry; they were a "Sett of uneasy, discontented, and innovating people." At first these dissenters had been holy men, but "they began to aspire after worldly Power and Greatness, their Godly Zeal abated, and in its Stead grew up Bigotry, Superstition and Party-Zeal." The Presbyterians appeared especially dangerous as a faction because their church organization provided leaders with influence and means of communication. The Presbyterians' loyalty to their church also made their support of government suspect, and it was commonly thought of them as of any faction, that they sought only their own interests. The religious leaders of the Paxtonians were "Party-men; warm Bigots, attach'd only to them of their own Community . . . which Community is well known to be an aspiring people, who, when they have attain'd their Aim, or gotten the Reins of Government in their Fists, have grasp'd it hard, and drove on Jehu-like." Samuel Foulke described the Presbyterians as "that Society thro'out the province being tainted with ye same bloody principles with respect to ye Indians and of disaffection to ye government."

In the aftermath of the Paxton affair such a faction was organized in an attempt to change the leadership of the provincial

69 "Remarks on The Quaker Unmask'd," 225.
70 "A Dialogue, Containing some Reflections on the late Declaration and Remonstrance, Of the Back-Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania," 122.
71 Ibid., 121.
72 Foulke, "Journal," 70.
government, but the attempt came from within the existing leadership. Governor Penn and William Allen revived the dormant Proprietary party and ousted Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway from their Assembly seats in the 1764 election. The Governor gave up his attempt to bring the Paxtonians to justice and otherwise courted the Presbyterians. The Assembly party retaliated by petitioning the King for a royal charter for Pennsylvania. Once the immediate threat was past, the unanimity of the province's political leadership in opposition to the Paxtonians was gone, and the old constitutional bickering was revived. To the old charges that the Propriety was "wresting from the people their Charter-rights and privileges . . . and opening channels of Dependence and Corruption through the Province," a new danger was added; his agents were accused of attempting to exploit western discontent with the government for the advantage of the Proprietary party. Franklin charged that the Governor's conduct strengthened the suspicion that he "has come to a private understanding with those Murderers, and that Impunity for their past Crimes is to be the Reward for their future political Services." It was only in these circumstances, after the Paxton affair itself was concluded, that the Assembly became stubborn about opposing an increase in the number of representatives for the western counties.

For reasons of self-interest and because of their social position, the men of the Assembly were unwilling to allow a new group to assume political power. They thought of themselves as peculiarly suited to govern; they viewed their role as that of stewards of the province's interests. The Paxton disturbance was particularly troublesome, not only because of its potential threat to their power, but also because it appeared to subvert the political and social order in Pennsylvania—an order that protected the liberties of the citizens in a well-established manner.

Much of the force behind the eastern response to the Paxton

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75 The Scribbler, being a letter from a gentleman in Town to his friend in the country (Philadelphia, 1764), 2.
77 Thayer, "Quaker Party," 33-34.
affair derived from anxiety about what the events revealed about the nature of Pennsylvania society. One pamphleteer cited the axiomatic principle that "Madness in any Society or People is generally a Fore-Runner of their Destruction. For, before the Almighty destroys a Nation or People, he permits them first to be so infatuated as to run into Extravagancies, which by natural Consequences, bring Destruction upon them." The political institutions of Pennsylvania seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Franklin, recommending a change in the charter as a possible cure, described the conditions as follows: "we are in a wretched Situation. The Government that ought to keep all in Order, is itself weak, and has scarce Authority enough to keep the common Peace . . . honest Citizens, threatened in their Lives and Fortunes, fil[e] the Province, as having no Confidence in the Publick Protection." The attempt to build a society in the wilderness seemed to be only partially successful: "such an inhuman murder as that at Lancaster, can only serve to convince the world, that there are among us persons more savage than Indians themselves."

The inability of Pennsylvanians to maintain justice and security made the province come off badly in any comparison with civilized states; for "if such an affair had happen'd in England, it would have brought your leaders to the common gallows . . . and your poor deluded followers, to transportation for life." Franklin, shocked by the indiscriminate murder of women and children, pointed out that "This is done by no civilized Nation in Europe. Do we come to America to learn and practise the Manners of Barbarians?" The Paxton affair forced Pennsylvanians of the mid-eighteenth century to consider the possibility that they might not be so civilized after all.

The dispute over the Paxton disturbance brought to light previously unrecognized aspects of Pennsylvania politics and

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"A Serious Address," 93.
"A Dialogue," 118.
"Franklin, "A Narrative of the Late Massacres, in Lancaster County," Franklin Papers, XI, 65."
showed that there were serious divisions in what men had thought was a harmonious society. These differences were primarily societal rather than political in nature. Men in the west relied on government to solve problems they could not solve themselves, and were more interested in the solutions than in the means used. In the east this practical approach to government was unsuitable because it could lead to the establishment of undesirable precedents. In the east, legal form and the effects of actions on institutions were important political considerations. The leaders in the more developed section of the colony felt compelled to explain the relationship between their individual interests and some larger good; the Paxtonians did not. It was implicit in the eastern position that society was made up of a diversity of interests, some of which conflicted with each other and therefore had to be regulated in an orderly fashion. The Paxtonians had a more simplistic conception of the composition of society and did not feel that order was important except as it involved their peace and security.

The dominant political conceptions in the late colonial period related the purpose of government to the needs of individual inhabitants, yet at the same time the lingerings of an organic view of society required that individuals not pursue their separate interests when they were contrary to those of society as a whole. The Paxton affair showed that the political conceptions established in Pennsylvania could not justify extra-legal actions undertaken simply on the basis of a felt personal necessity and in defiance of authority. The conflicts evident in the justifications and condemnations of the Paxtonians indicated an intellectual and psychological tension inherent in the social and political development of the colonies. In the early stages of settlement, the established European ways of doing things had to be abandoned when immediate practical problems required new courses of action. But as the new societies became more complex, men came to feel that they had to give up some of the previous flexibility if they were to have a stable and civilized society. This tension could lead to political crises like the Paxton disturbance, in which the two sides understood events differently. Because of the continuous process of settlement and development, there was a constant tension between the demands of the frontier and the expectations of a civilized society.