

54 FRANKLIN AND AMERICA'S TECHNOLOGY DEFICIT

the dominant European power and simultaneously marked the beginning of the conflict between Parliament and the North American colonies.¹³ And as the metropolis and peripheries evolved from complementary parts of a single whole into political adversaries, British writers and politicians began to question the wisdom of allowing emigration. English writers recognized that England had reached its dominant industrial position largely because it had managed to entice foreign workers to immigrate. Robert Wallace, for example, writing in 1764, attributed Britain's powerful international standing to its absorption of skilled French immigrants. The Protestant artisans expelled by Louis XIV "made a prodigious addition to the trade and manufactures of England, and was to France such an error in politics, that it will probably never recover." He urged the crown not to allow this pattern to repeat itself in its relations with its North American colonies. Some unfavorable travelers' accounts were published to discourage migration. A reverend who had sojourned in the middle colonies in 1759-60 announced that while he had found a certain degree of happiness, the idea that the heart of the British Empire was moving westward "was illusory and fallacious."¹⁴

On the political front, the earl of Hillsborough, who in 1763 became the president of the Board of Trade and in 1768 the secretary of state for the colonies, set out to stop emigration to America. Hillsborough was obsessed with depopulation of the countryside. The owner of nearly 100,000 acres of agricultural land in Ireland, Hillsborough worried about losing cheap labor to America. Others in London were less concerned with the departure of farm workers and more with maintaining the division of economic roles between the colonies and the metropolis. One English writer, for example, opposed the Stamp Act because it was a general tax on the North American colonies rather than a specific measure that assured continued employment and prosperity in the British Isles. He warned that "we daily see many of our Manufacturers and useful People

getting on that side of the Water." Thus the most prudent policy was not taxing the colonists, but "to favor their Industry in every Way but manufacturing, and securing to ourselves the Fruits thereof, by furnishing them with our Manufactures on cheaper Terms than they can procure them elsewhere." By the early 1770s, some Englishmen feared, as one Yorkshire writer warned, that unless something was done "England will really be drained of multitudes of mechanics of all sorts."¹⁵

As the debate over the imperial crisis intensified, discussion in Parliament in November 1773 centered on the problem of emigration. Fears that emigrants from continental Europe fueled separatist tendencies in the colonies led the ministry to issue an order in council forbidding all naturalization of such emigrants. As to emigration from the British Isles, instead of passing an act to restrict it, Parliament undertook to examine the phenomenon. The resulting study concluded that England was rapidly losing men of skill to the colonies.¹⁶ Restrictionist sentiment intensified. Josiah Child wrote in 1775 that because wool is the foundation of the English riches, all possible means ought to be used to keep it "within our own kingdom," and he hoped Parliament will enact "severe laws to prevent the exportation of skilled wool artisans and their machinery. After fighting between the colonies and Britain erupted, the lord advocate of Scotland, Henry Dundas, ordered his port authorities not to give clearance to vessels suspected of carrying emigrants to the rebellious colonies.¹⁷

Franklin participated in the debates over emigration even before they reached the forefront of British politics. In his "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" he argued that the Imperial government ought not to interfere with emigration because those leaving were being naturally replaced. "A Nation well regulated is like a Polypus; take away a Limb, its Place is soon supply'd." In London, representing the North American colonies, Franklin's