

## XI GOVERNMENT AT WAR

### 16 Residents of Monmouth County to the General Assembly on the State of the Economy

[Revolutionary Documents, 108, New Jersey State Library.]

Massive economic dislocation accompanied the revolutionary war. Government officials and private citizens alike had to contend with the destruction of property (see Sec. IX, Doc. 14), disruption of normal inter-colonial and international commerce, confiscation of produce and property, shortages of goods and services, rampant inflation, currency devaluation (see Doc. 6), price regulation, unusually heavy taxation, and market strains caused by provisioning the military (see Doc. 8). The legislature adopted numerous programs to deal with the various problems, but, not surprisingly, given the complications of the times, the measures were to no avail. In some instances government policies compounded the problems. In the petition that follows, residents of Monmouth County survey some of the more pressing economic concerns of the day and suggest means of facilitating the return of general prosperity.

Monmouth, May 12, 1781

The Memorial & Petition of the Subscribers Inhabitants of the County of Monmouth, Sheweth,

That the present critical & alarming Situation of publick Affairs Loudly call for Wisdom from you, plainness from us, & the utmost fortitude & perseverance from all. The Storm still rages—the Estates of Numbers of us are wrecked, either by means of external Violence or internal Policy, but our Spirits remain unsubdued, & we trust under the favour of Heaven & your wise Conduct, yet to rise Superior to our Distresses. The Ruin which our Enemys inflict is looked for, & indured with Fortitude, but when we meet ruin in the line of our duty, by Complying with Laws of our Country, we stand amazed! It is with regret we say, that it is evident to us, that many of our Distresses have either taken their rise from, or been Considerably increased by the unforeseen Measures Consequent upon the Policy of your Predecessors who have had the Management of the Affairs of America. That we may the more fully posses your Hon[ourab]le Houses with our Sentiments in a Matter where our temporal all is Depending, we beg leave to Mention some things, which to us appear to be first Principals in true Policy.

1st. The great maxim of all is, that Mankind are lead by Interest; Passion has much influence at times, but it soon subsides,—but the Influence of Interest is universal & Steady.

2dly. Hence it follows that the System of Laws in a State shou'd be so Constructed, as to make it the Advantage of Individuals to promote the publick weal, in which case (Shou'd every other Motive be wanting), self love will induce a man to Seek what will be most Conducive to the good of the publick, but the wheels of Government will ever move heavily, when it is the Interest of Individuals to neglect or break the laws.

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

3dly. The Staple of the State (which with us is Provision)<sup>1</sup> Ought to be encouraged. A State can never flourish while it's Staple Commodity Laguishes. Limitation of Prices & Embargoes may answer good purposes upon Special Emergencies, but if they are very frequent, or of Long duration, they become Pernicious, as they Usually Opperate as Taxes upon Industry, & Discourage the Raising the Articles they are Designed to make cheap, & in time produce an Effect directly contrary to what was Intended, i.e. they make those very Articles dear. If Possible necessary articles should be made Cheap by being made Plenty. Permit us to add that no State can Long flourish whilst the Imports thereof exceeds it's exports.

4thly. As our State money is in a fluctuating Situation & we are informed that a Measure adopting in some of our Neighbouring States, which Appears to us calculated to Ruin the Credit thereof by taking off the Tender,<sup>2</sup> your Memorialists would take the Liberty to Observe, that Publick faith should ever be Accounted Sacred & Maintained inviolable, that Breaches thereof must ever be productive of the most Severe Convulsions in the Community where they happen. They would therefore Humbly Recommend that more Severe Penalties may be Inflicted rather than the Tender taken off, that there may be more Encouragement given to the Informer in Cases where the Law may be violated & that the Fines Arising may be Converted to the Use of the County when they are Collected.

The above principals are so Clear in themselves, so Inseparable from good Policy, & have been so generally adopted by the Best of Rulers, that we should not presume to have mentioned them to your Hon[ora]ble Body had not the System of Politicks pursued by your Predecessors, by some Strange unforeseen fatality & as we presume contrary to their Intentions, Run Counter to them all.

Your Memorialists would further Recommend that the Supplies for the Army, Such as the Country produce may Raised in kind by Tax, Provision in kind to feed the Troops & Money to pay them & every Restraint upon Trade [be] taken off & it to be free to all the world, Excepting Great Brittain her Dependencies & Allies. By this means Supplies will be Raised Speedily & with Greater care & equity to Individuals & by making those Articles Necessary to all men & allowing each one to make the best Advantage of his Surpluss it will become the Interest of all to encourage the raising of them, & will, we trust in a Short Time prove a Source of wealth to enable us to carry on the War. . . .

That your Honours may have Wisdom and Discretion From above, to Promote the best Interest of the State, is the Devout wish, and fervent Desire of your Memorialists and Petitioners.<sup>3</sup>

[Thirty-four signatures affixed.]

1. That is, grain and livestock. On June 20, 1778, the legislature prohibited the export of basic provisions including wheat and beef.

2. That is, to reject New Jersey currency as legal tender.

3. A nearly identical petition bearing the same date and signed by fifty-four other Monmouth residents is located in the Manuscript Collection, Box 15, New Jersey State Library.