

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

battlefield, that Great Britain would seek a military rather than a political solution to the American problem.

Such foreboding proved justified. During the winter of 1774-1775 the British government worked out a plan to resolve the controversy by coupling conciliation with coercion. By early March the package was complete: for the future, Lord North pledged that Parliament would refrain from colonial taxation if Americans provided adequately for their own defense and civil government; for now, Britain would strengthen military and naval forces in North America and blockade those colonies adhering to the Association. As George III had declared in September 1774: "The dye is now cast, the colonies must either submit or triumph." To that much maligned monarch the issue was simple: America was in a state of rebellion.

Rebellions are seldom resolved peacefully, and the spectre of war that had long haunted young Jemima Condict, a semiliterate New Jersey farm girl, became a reality in the early morning hours of April 19 (Doc. 12). The exchange of musket fire between British regulars and Massachusetts militiamen at Lexington and the subsequent skirmish at Concord ignited the volatile atmosphere; from New Hampshire to Georgia colonials took up arms to avenge the spilling of American blood. The "shot heard round the world" echoed throughout New Jersey. Whigs gained the upper hand even in counties such as Bergen, where strong hostility toward the Continental Congress and bitter religious division within the Dutch Reformed Church undermined political unity (Doc. 14). Men everywhere made ready to meet any military contingency (Doc. 13).

By the summer of 1775 the dispute between Britain and America had reached the point of no return. After a decade of vacillation and capitulation, the British government had resolved to draw the line. There was really no alternative. The issue was no longer the merit of parliamentary legislation or the wisdom of imperial policies, but the sovereignty of Great Britain over the North American colonies. As Lord North observed in February 1775: if the American dispute "goes to the whole of our authority we can enter into no negotiation, we can make no compromise." The Americans were equally determined to resist, with arms if necessary, what they considered infringements of their constitutional rights and encroachments upon their traditional spheres of home rule. The die had indeed been cast.

1 "Y" to "Z" on Political Apostasy

[*Supplement to the New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser,*
January 12, 1775.]

IV THE DIE IS CAST

As the constitutional chasm between Britain and America widened and the protest movement assumed the characteristics of an incipient rebellion, some Jerseymen who had supported past opposition to imperial policies began to lose their enthusiasm. Resistance was one thing; rebellion quite another. Politics now began to divide friends, families, and former compatriots. Typically, as the following commentary illustrates, in the emotion-charged ideological atmosphere that obtained in New Jersey and elsewhere during the winter of 1774-1775, people found it difficult to impute sincere motives to those of differing opinions; suspicion, distrust, even paranoia were among the ruling passions of the day.

To Z.

An honest man's the noblest work of God.

POPE

Elizabeth Town, Jan. 5th, 1775

When a person departs from principles he has heretofore, on a similar occasion, openly avowed, it makes people suspect that there is some secret motive to influence him. I would just beg leave to ask you, Why this sudden change in your politics?

In the time of the memorable stamp act, you was one of the foremost to espouse the cause of your country; you was not that sycophant to men in power; not that enemy to meetings of the people; to consult for the preservation of their rights and liberties that you now are; for then you attended one with the rest of your profession, at which you held forth, and denied the omnipotence of the British Parliament;¹ neither were the names of delegate or Congress ungrateful to your ear: At the time above alluded to, you attended a convention of the representatives of your colony at a publick house for the express purpose of appointing delegates to meet in congress; and even went so far (if I am not misinformed) as to act as their clerk.² But now the case is altered, meetings of the people and appointments of committees, in your opinion, are illegal; delegates and congresses are unconstitutional, and the resolves and proceedings of the best and wisest men in America, entered into upon the noblest principles, the good of their country, are not to be regarded, or adhered to. But on the other hand acts of Parliament, or rather edicts of the British ministry, for blocking up the port of Boston, for robbing the people of Massachusetts Bay of their charter (which is, and ought to be, as sacred as magna charta), depriving those people of the trial by jury, the palladium of British liberty, and for carrying them to Great Britain to be tried for offences committed in America (an act made to shelter villains from the hands of justice), and the act for introducing popery and French laws in America, meet with your warmest patronage and support; and I make no doubt that if the ministry and British Parliament should in their great wisdom take it in their heads to pass an act for abolishing Christianity and introducing the alkoran³ and Mahometan religion into America, it would likewise partake of your approbation; for, as it is a proverb among the Turks, that, one renegadoe is worse than ten Turks; so it has always been one among the Christians, that one apostate is worse than ten infidels.

In your last performance, inserted in Rivington's paper of the first of last month, addressed to the people of New Jersey, you endeavored to set the proceedings of the

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Congress, in a ridiculous light;⁴ you say, "*that chosen on one side, they seem to have had nothing else in view than to please their electors and forward confusion among us.*" What you mean by chosen on one side, I cannot divine; but if you mean that a few placemen did not give their votes for them, or that the inhabitants of your great city, did not attend any of the meetings for choosing committees, tho' nine-tenths of them approve of what was done, and of the opposition to the acts of Parliament; I say if either of these be your meaning, I readily agree that they were chosen on one side.

But at the same time you know, and must confess, that never men were chosen with more honour to themselves than the congress were, or executed the great trust reposed in them by their constituents, with more wisdom, spirit and integrity. And it has been a matter of surprise to me, as well as to others, that you, in your all-sufficiency, have not issued your mandate, to convene together all placemen and pensioners, the only friends of government (as you stile yourselves), when you might form a monarchical congress, in opposition to the grand continental *republican* congress; then you could in the *plainest language* represent to your masters, the ministry and Parliament of Great Britain, that you were a set of the cleverest, the worthiest, the loyalest and the honestest fellows in America; that the rest of your fellow subjects in America were a parcel of republican traytors; that their grievances were ideal, and had no existence, but in their own clamours. Then you might *form a system by which the present differences might be solved* but what sort of a system it would be, I leave your "*friends and countrymen, the people of New Jersey*" to judge; for my part, I am afraid it would be a system of slavery.

In the next place, you seem to be apprehensive that the people of Great Britain will receive the appeal to them with disgust, because (as you say) the Congress have overlooked their legislature with sovereign contempt, and ask whether *that people will not take offence at the indignity so manifestly shewn them.* I answer you, they will not. They will receive it with that conscious dignity becoming freemen, appealed to by a brave and spirited people, tenacious of their just rights and liberties, and who are oppressed by the machinations of a wicked and abandoned ministry, aided by a corrupt and venal part of their legislature.

I shall pass over the rest of your performance unnoticed; as every person possessed of the least discernment, can see your drift, and that it is a piece of mere declamation, manifestly intended to create jealousies, and divide the people in the colonies; who, I am sure, have more understanding and integrity, than to be led away by the idle fears and apprehensions of any anonymous ministerial writer—especially when opposed to the united wisdom of the Grand Continental Congress.

But before I conclude, I shall just beg leave to ask, how, in the name of wonder, you came to let the following sentence drop from your pen? "*All changes in government, my brethren, are dangerous to the people.*" There I agree with you; it is what the people of America are now guarding against, and the cause in which the brave Bostonians are now suffering; those eleven words have overthrown all you have already written, or hereafter shall write, on the disputes between the colonies and the mother country: But truth, tho' involuntary, will come out, and I shall not hereafter look upon you to be that enemy to the liberties of your country, that you have affected to seem, but rather as an opposer of the tyrannical measures of the British ministry.

As the Congress, in all their proceedings, have done what they ought to have

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done; and you, in all your's, have done what you ought not to have done; let me intreat you, as a friend, and as you regard your reputation and the approbation of your American brethren, to reform and turn from your evil ways; for, believe me, you will not, for your doughty performances, be closetted by your sovereign, nor be made a Privy Counsellor; you will neither be made a Knight of the Garter, a Knight Banneret, nor a Knight of the Bath; neither will you be made even one of the poor Knights of Windsor. You will not receive the thanks of the House of Lords or Commons; nor if I had my will, should you get (what you are seeking after and expect) either place or pension.

Y.

1. The meeting of lawyers in Perth Amboy on September 19, 1765 which resulted in an agreement by the attorneys not to use stamps or stamped paper in their legal transactions.

2. John Lawrence (1726-1796), assemblyman from Burlington City from 1761 to 1768, served as clerk of the meeting. Is Lawrence "Z"? A wealthy lawyer, devout Anglican, and former mayor of Burlington, Lawrence became a Loyalist exile in December 1776.

3. Alcoran: The Koran.

4. See Sec. III, Doc. 10.

2 Governor William Franklin to the General Assembly

[*Votes and Proceedings, January 11-February 13, 1775* (Burlington, 1775), pp. 5-7.]

The current imperial crisis weighed especially heavily upon the shoulders of Governor William Franklin. Cognizant that he lacked the authority and ability to stem the tide of resistance, he looked for a way to counter the popular front. Extralegal organizations and activities had proliferated in part because the legislature, which had largely directed the protest movement in the past, had not sat since March 1774; yet to call the assembly was to risk escalating the problem by means of legislative endorsement of the congressional program. Deciding to gamble, Franklin summoned the General Assembly in January 1775. His opening message to the solons reveals his strategy: by stressing the responsibilities of the representatives and the stakes at hand, he hoped to dissuade the assembly from sanctioning the action of the Continental Congress. In particular, he endeavored to break the united front of opposition by inducing the lower house to send a separate remonstrance to the king instead of acquiescing in the congressional petition. He realized neither objective (see Docs. 4 and 7).