

IV THE DIE IS CAST

9 “Essex” to “D.C.” on Intercolonial Unity

[*New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser*, April 20, 1775.]

The popular front in New Jersey was not a monolith: its ranks were comprised of individuals of diverse backgrounds and perceptions. But in addition to their common opposition to imperial policies, these disparate elements were convinced that the redress of grievances for which they struggled could be achieved only through unified purpose and program. In the essay that follows, “Essex” discusses the necessity of forging and maintaining a united front, pleads for unity, and warns of the consequences of division. He recognizes that the key to the common cause is the Continental Congress—a popular body that provided for the first time “national” perspective and leadership to the resistance movement.

New-Jersey, March 25, 1775

Dear Sir,¹

Since the writing of No. 1,² we have been agreeably entertained with intelligence from London, favorable to the good cause, in which, not only these colonies, but Great-Britain and all her other dependences are so deeply interested. I congratulate you, and the rest of the friends to the constitution, on the receipt of these, and every other appearance in our favour. Permit me to enumerate a few of these: For a proper and general attention to them, would do much toward strengthening our union, and defeating the base designs of those who oppose the general good. And the first thing to be remarked, is the greatness of the union subsisting among ourselves, on which, under providence, depends our greatest hope of success. This union appeared remarkably, in the sentiments of all the colonies respecting the propriety and necessity of appointing Delegates to meet in general Congress. And since, in their appointing so many men, who, when met, were so exactly suited to one another in sentiments, as they in fact were. For when Representatives are properly chosen, without bribery or any other undue influence, they naturally carry with them the sentiments of their electors, from whom they also receive the outlines of their conduct in general directions. When these Delegates met, they began their solemn and important business by bowing themselves before the great Sovereign of the universe, to whom they could with a pure conscience appeal, as to the justice of their cause. And on whom they, in the use of proper means, depended, for all that assistance, which was necessary to ensure success. And for this they humbly implored the divine clemency and goodness. At the same time, or as near it, as the provinces could judge, there were many hundreds of congregations of their constituents beseeching Almighty Goodness for the same divine aid. They believed their cause was His, and could therefore go boldly to the throne of grace.

Here, Sir, is union. A continent on their knees imploring the alliance of a God! This is an appearance favourable to us. And in this view the enemies of America might do well to remember the advice of Gamaliel.³ Let us revolve in our minds

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

the proceedings of this Congress, and see what appearances here are favourable to us. Caution, justice, loyalty, knowledge, moderation, wisdom, benevolence, deliberation, humanity, resolution, fortitude, self denial, self defiance, piety, and, to crown the whole, a remarkable union in all these. Antient Rome in her highest pitch of power and glory, never produced an Assembly of worthies better qualified to govern an empire than these. The desire of this Congress appears evidently to be, that all the disturbances, divisions, conclusions, ill will and oppression in the whole of his Majesty's dominions should cease; and that peace, union and harmony, with constitutional liberty, and a just dependence of one part on the other, should exist throughout the whole of this great empire, which they desire should be governed, in all its parts, by his present Majesty George III. and a Protestant succession in his family, together with such other legislative powers as are, by the British constitution, and Provincial charters, established.

No wise and good men, I conceive, when once truly and sufficiently acquainted with their designs, as stated above, can wish that they should be defeated. If we pursue this union in the resolutions of the Congress to their being put into execution in the several united provinces, we shall find that it prevails against all opposition, and that the opposers of congressional measures are comparatively but very few. I do not at present recollect more than three towns in the opposition in all the four provinces of New-England, and those none of the the most considerable. The names, in tenderness to the virtuous part of their inhabitants, are here omitted. However, considering the measures taken with them by their wiser neighbors, it is very probable they will soon be brought to a sense of their error, and will return to their duty.

In this and the southern provinces, I believe, the opposition is as full as small. Some few places in the province of New-York are delinquent; but they appear to be returning to their duty. The city and county of New-York have been esteemed by far the most so; but by a late fair trial it appears that there are more than five to one in favour of the Congress.⁴ And this probably will break the heart of all the opposition in America. The news from Great-Britain and the West-India islands, so favourable to us, will contribute much to the same valuable purpose. Some indeed have lately attempted to land goods in America contrary to the association of the Congress, but such is the vigilance of those excellent inspectors, the committees of New-York and Elizabeth Town, and such the awful guilt of the delinquents, that they could not be hid. They have confessed their fault and laid a heavy fine upon themselves for their base conduct.⁵ Another person concerned in the same dark affair is also detected, and will, it is thought, be sufficiently punished. In fine, if we continue to pursue the wise measures of the Congress, the merchants and manufacturers in England and the West-India islanders will do all in their power to procure a redress of all our grievances. And we have a great, great reason to hope, that by the favourable interposition of Divine Providence their united endeavors will soon produce the desired effect.

I remain, dear Sir, your's and the constitution's friend,
ESSEX

1. Identities unknown, but "Essex" sounds very much like Elias Boudinot. Is "D. C." Daniel Coxe (see Sec. 1, Doc. 1)?

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2. On March 18, "Essex" wrote to "D. C." of the "strong party too near the Throne" that was "opposing the general good of the nation, to the great danger of the King, the Protestant succession and interest, and even the very existence, of the empire as such" by invading "the rights of mankind in every part of the empire." "In this view of things," he concluded, "no wonder if we should esteem those Traitors to the King who are using their utmost efforts to undermine his throne, by destroying its basis, the Constitution. Hence, Loyalty itself justifies us in opposing such men and such measures. This view justifies all the military preparations now making in America. The stronger we are in these, the safer is the Empire. We mean to act only on the defensive. We ought by no means to strike the first blow, nor to provoke those who would. This is certainly a great point to carry against those who call us Rebels, and would make us so, if they could. I know you will strictly adhere to the wise directions of our loyal Congress, according to which, while you encourage the doubtful and instruct the ignorant, you will punish the guilty and thereby greatly oblige your humble Friend." *New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser*, April 6, 1775.

3. A Pharisee, a doctor of the law, who urged caution and moderation when the irate Sanhedrin (high Jewish tribunal) sought to slay the apostles for their forthright testimony to Christ. Acts 5:33-40.

4. At an election on March 16, 1775, sponsored by the Committee of Sixty, residents of New York City voted by a margin of 825-163 to send delegates to the Second Continental Congress.

5. In late February the Elizabethtown Committee of Observation launched an investigation of the illegal landing of cargo from the ship *Beulah* while anchored off Sandy Hook. Subsequently, the offenders, New York City Quaker merchants John and Robert Murray, confessed their misdeeds to the New York committee and were pardoned.

10 Chief Justice Frederick Smyth to the Middlesex County Grand Jury

[Frederick Smyth Papers, American Philosophical Society Library.]

In contrast to John Hatton, Jr., (see Doc. 8), Chief Justice Frederick Smyth was less concerned about the specific actions and arguments of the popular front than about the long-range implications of disrespect for government and disregard for laws. After a routine charge to the Middlesex County Grand Jury, Smyth delivered a lengthy disquisition on the subject of law and order. His remarks constitute a classic statement of political conservatism; in his mind, respect for government and the rule of law were the cornerstones of civilized society. Pointing out the crucial distinction between liberty and license,