

VII FROM COLONY TO STATE

in America likewise played a part in the decision. But there can also be no doubt that the political stance of the old family patriarch was heavily influenced by the staunch Whiggism of his sons, John, Jr., and Richard, and his brother-in-law, William Alexander, the self-styled Lord Stirling. Whatever the reasons, John Stevens reluctantly, albeit with resolve, joined the rebellion. (His resignation came as no surprise to Governor William Franklin, who had long regarded Stevens as an opportunistic trimmer whose loyalty was questionable.)

June 1776

Sir

It is with the greatest concern I see the dispute between Great Britain and these Colonys Arisen to the present alarming Situation of Both Countrys. While I had hopes of an Accommodation of our unhappy Controversy, I was unwilling to quit a Station which enabled me to be serviceable to my Country, but the Continuation of Hostilities by The British Ministry and the large Armament of Foreign Troops Daily expected to invest our Country, leaves me no longer room to doubt that an intire Submission of These Colonys with a view of Internal Taxation is their Ultimate Object. Your Excellency will not wonder I should prefer the duty I owe my Native Country to any other Consideration. I therefore beg leave to resign my Seat at the Council Board. I am

Your Excellency's Most
Obedient Humble Servt
JOHN STEVENS

2 A Loyalist Petition to the Provincial Congress Against Independence

[*New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury*, June 24, 1776; manuscript copy in the Frederick Smyth Papers, American Philosophical Society Library.]

The division of opinion in New Jersey on the issue of independence was reflected in the petitions on the topic submitted in June to the Provincial Congress, now generally recognized as the primary governing body in the colony. Twelve petitions supported the formation of a new government in accordance with the May 15 resolution of the Continental Congress (but only one explicitly advocated independence) while seven memorials opposed separation. In addition, a petition allegedly signed by "upwards of 900 Freeholders" appeared in the *New-York Gazette* in the form of an open letter to the congressmen. This document, which appears below, indicates the tenacity with which many

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

political moderates clung to hopes of reconciliation with the mother country at this late date. The identity of the circulators and signers of the statement is unknown, but it would appear that Chief Justice Frederick Smyth (see Sec. IV, Doc. 10), was involved in the project since a manuscript copy of the petition is located among his papers.

June 1776

Permit us, Gentlemen, to assure you, that altho' we daily experience and sincerely lament in common with our Fellow Subjects, Inhabitants of the Colonies, the calamitous Consequences of the present unhappy Controversy with Great-Britain, we cannot but think that we should ill discharge the Duty we owe to our Country, ourselves, our Children, and Posterity, if we neglected to exert ourselves by every Effort in our Power to prevent our Condition, tho' truly deplorable, from becoming perfectly desperate; which we are convinc'd must necessarily be the Consequence, if a total Separation from, and Independancy of the Government of Great-Britain should be resolv'd upon, declared, and attempted in this Province.

We do not presume, Gentlemen, to dictate to you, or even to instruct you; we address you as Fellow-Subjects and Fellow-Sufferers, zealous for the Rights of America in general, but particularly anxious for the real Welfare of New-Jersey; as such we trust that you will be too deeply impress'd with the Recollection of the peculiar Happiness and Prosperity heretofore enjoyed by the Inhabitants of this Continent, connected with and subject to the Government of Great-Britain, not to dread the Consequences of a declar'd Separation from that Country. We trust, Gentlemen, that you will have the Honour, the Interest, Safety, and Welfare, of this your native Country, too much at Heart, to suffer this once flourishing and happy Province, to the reproachful and calamitous Consequences of an avowed Separation.

Permit us also, Gentlemen, to suggest, that we cannot but think, that any precipitate Resolves to change our present constitutional Form of Government, must, in their Consequences, operate to retard and obstruct what we are persuaded you, Gentlemen, as well as ourselves, cannot wish to loose Sight of, as the primary and constant Object of the present unhappy Dispute, namely, a safe, honourable, and lasting Reconciliation with Great-Britain on constitutional Principles. To effect which desirable End, we apprehend the Union of the Colonies was recommended—for which Purpose alone was the Continental Congress delegated, and their Authority hitherto submitted to, and upon the same Hopes of Peace and Reconciliation we are daily impatiently expecting Commissioners from his Majesty. From these Considerations, Gentlemen, we were convinc'd that Sentiments of Separation and Independence must be not only highly impolitic, but may be of the most dangerous and destructive Consequences; add to which, Gentlemen, as we have the Satisfaction to see the General Assembly of this Province legally conven'd, and from Time to Time duly meeting and in the full exercise of their legislative Authority and Jurisdiction, and as the principal Officers of Government in this Colony are now amongst us and engaged in the Duties of their Station, our Courts of Justice and publick Offices open, and Business there conducted with Order and Regularity, our present established Mode of Government we are convinc'd will continue as it has hitherto been experienced to be, fully sufficient to the Exigencies

VII FROM COLONY TO STATE

of our Affairs, and best conduce to the Happiness and Safety of the People of New-Jersey.

That you, Gentlemen, may join in Sentiments and Opinion with us on the present Occasion, and strenuously adhere to, maintain, and assert our present Mode of Government as founded on the British Constitution, and established and confirm'd by the Laws of the Land, is the sincere and hearty Prayer of, &c.

3 Elias Boudinot, "Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs"

[Andre de Coppet Collection, 105, Firestone Library, Princeton University.]

Even the staunchest supporters of resistance to the imperial policies of Great Britain feared the military and political repercussions of independence. Of immediate concern were the monumental military effort that would be required in a contest with the greatest military power in the world and the terrible ravages that would accompany the civil war that was certain to erupt in America. Of greater concern for the long run was the viability of republican government—was such a mode of government feasible in America or would it result in the ruination of the country and the destruction of political liberties? Elias Boudinot, a strong Whig but ever the voice of moderation and reason, attempted to answer these and other important questions as he weighed the issue of independence. He eventually overcame his pessimism and served as a member of the Confederation Congress (1777-1778, 1781-1784), president of the Congress (1782-1783), and member of the United States House of Representatives (1789-1795).

June 11, 1776

Soon as we Declare for Independancy, every prospect of Peace must Vanish. Ruthless War, with all it's aggravated horrors, will Ravage our Once happy Land; our Sea Coasts & Ports will be Ruined & our Ships taken as Pyrates; Torrints of Blood be Spilt, & thousands reduc'd to beggery & wretchedness. This Melancholy Contest wou'd [torn] till one Side Conquered. Supposing Britton Victorious; however high my opinion of Brittish Generosity, I shou'd be exceeding Sorry to Receive terms from her, in the haughty tone of A Conquerer—Or—Supposing Such A failure of her manufacturies, *Comerce* & Strength, that Victory shou'd incline to the Side of America, yet who Can Say in that Case what extremities her Sense of Resentment & self Preservation will Drive G. B. to? For my part I shou'd not in the least be Surpris'd if on Such A prospect, as the Independancy of America, She wou'd parcel out this Continent to the Dif[feren]t European Powers. Canada might be Restor'd to