

### III THE COMMON CAUSE

congressmen themselves, representing all the colonies except Georgia, were uncertain how to proceed. During nearly two months of intensive debate, the more radical delegates slowly came to dominate the sessions. In the end the Congress adopted addresses to the people of Great Britain and Canada as well as America, issued a declaration of colonial rights and grievances, and proposed a total boycott of British goods. Its most important action, however, was the creation of the Association, which called for the formation of local committees of inspection and observation to enforce compliance with the economic sanctions. Before adjourning on October 26, the Congress agreed to reconvene on May 10 if American complaints had not yet been resolved.

The First Continental Congress was a turning point in the development of the resistance movement. For the first time there existed a national deliberative body to direct intercolonial activities. Moreover, by imposing the Association the Philadelphia conclave presented Americans with a crisis of allegiance: should they obey the duly constituted government or the extralegal Congress? The result was a brief period of political adjustment as people grappled with the alterations in the nature and scope of the resistance organization. While some Jerseymen enthusiastically endorsed and implemented the congressional program (Docs. 11 and 12), others censured the congressmen (Doc. 10) and committeemen (Doc. 15); some, like Samuel Allinson, sought to take advantage of the times to strike additional blows for human freedom (Doc. 8), while others sought glamorous ways of demonstrating political faith (Doc. 14). All in all, the recommendations of the Congress became the orders of the day during the latter months of 1774 because of popular belief in their efficacy (Doc. 9), the inability of the royal regime to prevent them (Doc. 13), and the lack of a viable conservative alternative.

By the end of 1774 the Boston radicals' destruction of East India tea and the equally rash passage of the Massachusetts Acts had raised the Anglo-American conflict to a new, more dangerous height. The controversy over the constitutional relationship between the mother country and the colonies had been joined anew; moreover, the enthusiastic support of the blockaded Bostonians and the formulation of a national program of resistance by the Continental Congress had forged unprecedented intercolonial solidarity. Most Americans were now united in a common cause.

#### 1 The Committee of Correspondence of the New Jersey Assembly to the Boston Committee of Correspondence

[Minutes of the Boston Committee of Correspondence, 8:709-10, Bancroft Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.]

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

On March 12, 1773, the Virginia House of Burgesses took an important step in the development of effective intercolonial communications by forming a standing committee of correspondence empowered to act on behalf of the colony when the legislature was not in session. New Jersey, the last of the colonies to accept Virginia's invitation to form a similar committee, named a nine-member panel on February 8, 1774. It was this committee that met in New Brunswick on May 31 to respond to the emergency message of the Boston Committee of Correspondence regarding the Port Act. Apparently James Kinsey of Burlington, Stephen Crane of Essex, and Edward Taylor of Monmouth did not attend the meeting; at least they did not sign the response to the Boston letter. Although all signers were from West Jersey, the pledge of solidarity was the first step toward the creation of a province-wide concept of a common cause and a sense of intercolonial unity.

New Brunswick, May 31st 1774

Gentlemen,

Yours of the 13th Ins[tan]t enclosing a Copy of the late Act of Parliament for blocking up the Harbour of Boston and the Resolutions of the Town Meeting in consequence thereof is now before us. It is with the deepest concern we View the proceedings of Administration and late Act of Parliament respecting Boston, and look not only upon ourselves but all the other Colonies to be equally concerned with you in that Terrible and Unconstitutional Act. We propose at so alarming an Event to request our Governor to call the Assembly & hope you will find us disposed, to join you in appointing Deputies to attend a Congress, Petitioning the King or in adopting any other legal mode for obtaining redress that may be thought most Eligible or most likely to succeed.

We hear that the severall Committees of Merchants and private Men of property in the different Colonies propose a Congress of their deputies for the purpose of a Non Importation & perhaps a Non Exportation Agreement,<sup>1</sup> & Submit to you whether a Congress from the severall Assemblies to Meet at the same Time would not be an Eligible mode of proceeding. We would by all Means recommend Moderation and firmness for we look upon this to be the Crisis that will determine us Freeman or Slaves. Whatever Measures you adopt, you'll please to communicate them to us with all convenient speed, and direct your Letters to James Kinsey Esqr. at Burlington. May a kind Providence Interpose & avert the impending ruin.

We are with great Esteem, Gentlemen your sincere Friends, and willing to be your fellow sufferers in the Cause of Liberty.

HENDRICK FISHER<sup>2</sup>  
SAMUEL TUCKER<sup>3</sup>  
JOHN WETHERILL<sup>4</sup>  
ROBERT FRIEND PRICE<sup>5</sup>  
JOHN HINCHMAN<sup>6</sup>  
JOHN MEHELM<sup>7</sup>

### III THE COMMON CAUSE

1. On May 21 a group of Philadelphia merchants known as the Committee of Nineteen declined to participate in an economic boycott prior to the holding of a general congress; two days later its New York City counterpart, the Committee of Fifty-one, came to the same decision.

2. German-born Hendrick Fisher (1697-1779) of Bound Brook was the dean of Jersey legislators, representing Somerset County continuously from 1745 to 1776. A farmer and mechanic by occupation, he also served as judge of the county court of common pleas. Active in the affairs of the Dutch Reformed Church, he was a trustee of Queen's College (now Rutgers University). Fisher was an ardent Whig, representing New Jersey at the Stamp Act Congress in 1765, serving on the county committee of correspondence in 1774, and exercising leadership in the Provincial Congress as both president (1775) and vice-president (1775-1776).

3. Samuel Tucker (1721-1789), a merchant and large landowner from Trenton, served as assemblyman from Hunterdon County from 1769 to 1776. A justice of the peace as well as sheriff of the county, the Presbyterian Tucker was nonetheless active in protest politics as member of the county committee of correspondence (1774), standing committee of correspondence for New Jersey (1774), vice-president (1775) and president (1775-1776) of the Provincial Congress, and signer of the state constitution of 1776. Still, he was a suspected inactive Loyalist (probably a neutral) during the War for Independence.

4. Presbyterian John Wetherill (?-1784), a South Brunswick farmer, represented Middlesex County in the legislature from 1749 to 1776. He served on the county committee of correspondence in 1774 and in the Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1776.

5. Quaker Robert Friend Price was an assemblyman from Gloucester County from 1769 to the outbreak of the Revolution.

6. John Hinchman, like Price a member of the Society of Friends, represented Gloucester in the lower house from 1769 to 1776.

7. Upon immigrating from Ireland to America, John Mehelm taught school in Berks County, Pennsylvania, before taking up farming near Tewksbury, New Jersey. He served as assemblyman from Hunterdon County from 1772 to 1776, service that did not prevent him from sitting in the Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1776.

## 2 The Essex County Resolves on the Boston Port Act

[New Jersey Manuscripts, AM 13951, Firestone Library, Princeton University. The rough draft of the resolves printed here differs substantially from the abbreviated account published in the *Pennsylvania Journal*; and the *Weekly Advertiser* on June 29, 1774 and reprinted *NJA*, 29:406-8.]