

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

population. To help alleviate the problem, the legislature in 1758 authorized the construction of five 300-man barracks in Elizabethtown, Perth Amboy, New Brunswick, Trenton, and Burlington. The decision to build the facilities was fortunate, for the decision of the British government in 1763 to station troops in the western territories acquired from France meant that a steady stream of soldiers traveling to and from the wilderness would be cantoned temporarily in New Jersey. A new problem emerged in 1765 when Parliament extended the Quartering Act to North America, requiring that the entire cost of quartering and provisioning troops be defrayed by the colony in which they were stationed.

To show their displeasure at what appeared to be an unreasonable attitude on the part of the British government regarding paper currency, the New Jersey legislature first threatened and then actually withheld the funds necessary to supply the royal troops. Although relations between soldiers and citizens were on the whole exemplary (Doc. 8), the sporadic incidents that occurred exacerbated the entire problem (Doc. 2). As relations with Britain deteriorated, Jerseymen increasingly feared the political dangers posed by the presence of a standing army (Doc. 14) and resented the expense involved in maintaining peacetime garrisons (Doc. 15). (Actually as well as proportionally, New Jersey hosted more British soldiers than any other American colony from 1765 to 1770.) The withdrawal of all British forces from New Jersey in November 1771 resolved the military problem; the currency issue lingered until the enactment of legislation acceptable to the Privy Council in 1774.

Despite repeal of most of the Townshend duties and the subsequent demise of colonial resistance, the Anglo-American situation remained explosive. Britain could not permit continued colonial challenges to its legislative supremacy; Americans would not admit the legitimacy of parliamentary taxation. The constitutional stakes in the imperial dispute were near the point of being nonnegotiable. Moreover, the annual contests between governor and assembly in New Jersey over soldiers and currency contributed measurably to the growing spirit of resistance to British authority and feeling of alienation from the empire that would come to a head in the years 1775-1776. In short, it would take little to transform resistance into rebellion.

1 Richard Stockton to Samuel Smith

[Dartmouth Papers, 822, Staffordshire County Record Office, Stafford, England. I have supplied paragraphing for a lengthy text that originally consisted of only two paragraphs.]

Samuel Smith, an attorney and wealthy merchant of the Old Jewry section of London, was well versed in colonial administration by virtue of his service as agent for North Carolina from 1759 to 1764. Richard Stockton, then

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in Britain on a mission to persuade the Reverend John Witherspoon to accept the presidency of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), probably met Smith through a mutual friend, Dennys De Berdt. It is not certain whether Smith on his own initiative passed on the letter to Lord Dartmouth, or whether Stockton intended Smith to be an intermediary and thus was really directing his comments to the man who was then under consideration for appointment as the first secretary of state for the American Department with jurisdiction over colonial affairs. In any event, Stockton's thoughts about the economic and political problems plaguing the empire as well as his reasoned proposals to resolve them illustrate that not all Jerseymen were narrow provincials who were unable to perceive the larger, more fundamental issues confronting Britain and her American colonies. Taxation and commerce were only the immediate causes of imperial contentions; the underlying problem was the future relationship between the mother country and the developing provinces.

Channel Row, Dorset Court, Westminster, March 21st 1767

Dear Sir,

. . . . Ever since I have been in this Country, upon every Occasion, I have made it my Business to examine into the Cause of the Poverty, Riches, Luxury and Grandeur of the different Inhabitants, and to consider the natural Operation of these several Causes and Effects upon the public Good. I have endeavoured to compare together the public Debt of the Nation, the current Expences of Government, and the Ways and Means by which they are to be discharged: And I must confess, that no Method among yourselves appears to me to have been left untried. Every Stream of national Supply seems to have been fathomed; and, from an unhappy Necessity, you are now exhausting the very Fountains themselves.¹ The amazing Luxury of these Kingdoms has raised the Price of all kinds of Provisions, and, as necessarily, that of every Manufacture: A Step further, & your Neighbours will be able to undersell you; and then the Issue will be dreadful. It is a Reflection not more disagreeable than true in Fact, that the unhappy Causes of these Distresses are not likely to cease; but, it is to be feared, may become more & more operative. From whence then, in any future Period, is that tremendous Load of national Debt to be discharged? From whence is the Principal to be paid off, when the most fruitful Invention cannot now find an Expedient sufficient to answer the annual Interest with the necessary Expences of Government? What Rock is there in the Wilderness, which being smitten by the Rod of some auspicious Minister, some chosen Chief, filled with like Benignity and Wisdom as the renowned Leader of Israel, will send forth the most plentiful and salutary Streams? Such a one I verily believe there is; and I shall endeavour to point out where it lies. . . .

That the Continent of America has for sometime been able to bear a Part in the public Expences, I know has of late been frequently asserted; but, I conceive, without sufficient Reason. No Inhabitant of this Country, who has not been upon the Spot and thoroughly examined the matter, can conceive the Difficulties in carrying on a Trade with these Kingdoms, for want of an adequate Medium of Remittance.² The Trade of the continental Colonies has constantly languished under improper

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Restrictions; and the Measure of their Distress, for about a Year past, has been filled up to the Brim by the prohibiting Act of Parliament respecting their Bills of Credit.³ The Farmer has no Sale for his Produce: The Culture of their Lands thereby becomes neglected; and further Settlements are discouraged. The Inhabitants, by these means, become sour & disgusted with the Mother Country, and are indisposed to obey her Commands: And indeed it is antinatural to suppose, that Children will yield a chearful Obedience to the Commands of their Parents, unless those Commands are sweetened with Moderation and Kindness. Taskmasters were once justly denominated cruel, who required Bricks to be made, and at the same time prohibited Straw. The Restrictions upon the Trade with the foreign West Indies is the capital Matter now complained of by the Continent of America; and no Device, within the Compass of human Reason, would I believe at this Time so effectually promote the mutual Interest of the whole British Empire as the taking them off.⁴ The continental Trade would be put upon its natural Footing, would increase with great Rapidity, and must all finally center in this Kingdom; for even an American Farmer will scarcely wear a Coat or ride upon a Saddle, that does not come from England, if he can find Means to procure them. As the natural and necessary Consequences of this Step would be a prodigious Increase of Trade & Settlement; so a considerable Department of the Army and Navy would be required for their Protection and Defence. The Inhabitants themselves knowing the Necessity would desire it; their Increase of Wealth would enable them; and their Temper, conciliated by the Kindness of the Mother Country, would incline them to contribute *liberally* to their Support.

I know the Genius of America perfectly well. The Inhabitants, like the Stock from which they sprang, are generous and brave: they can easily be led, but not so easily driven. I will not undertake to determine the Extent of the Jurisdiction of the Parliament of G. Britain: it is like some other Arcana of the English Government, which had better never be decided upon, or even debated. But I will venture to determine upon another Point, which I think very clear; and that is, upon the Colonies being made able, in the manner I have before pointed out, that their several Legislatures, in a manner best suited to the different Circumstances of their Constituents, will contribute as largely to the general Expences of Government as can reasonably be desired or wished by this Country. Under all the Inconveniences of former times, they have constantly complied with the Requisitions of the Crown in furnishing Men and Money for the public Cause; unless in one or two Colonies, where the Governors were injuriously tied down by a Set of arbitrary Instructions from a Proprietary & thereby prevent from giving their Assent to such Bills as were offered him by the Assemblies for the Subsistence and Cloathing of the Troops.⁵ And even in these Colonies, the Claim of Right had a temporary Suspension, and they submitted to the proprietary Injunctions, lest the common Cause should suffer.

The more effectually and speedily to bring about these desirable Ends, I would think that a Measure, which has been hitherto much pursued, should be altered; and that is, the filling the principal offices of the provincial Governments with Persons of no Fortunes, Connections, or Influence in that Country; and indeed it may be said, as to far the greater Part of them, of no Fortunes, Connections, or Influence in *any* Country. Hence the People receive them ungraciously, put no Confidence in them, and are ever suspicious of their Designs. Whereas if Men of Fortune, Character & Influence, resident there, were appointed to all the highest Offices in the several

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Governments, they, having the Confidence of the People, and their own Estates being upon the same Footing with those whom they governed, would have it in their Power, with great Ease, to bring the People to such Measures as would be calculated for the general Good, without those Heats & Animosities so frequently complained of. It is an absurd Objection, that such Persons would be more likely to give up Points, which the Crown would choose to retain; because as they hold their Offices during the King's Pleasure, no man would accept of an Office with a Design of being turned out; which he would be sure of, when he disobeyed his Master's Commands.

The Propriety of the general Scheme of Regulation for the Colonies above proposed, is not, in the least attacked by saying, that it would soon render them rich, numerous and powerful, and thereby perhaps induce them to attempt a State of Independency upon the Mother-Country. And had not this Objection been really and frequently made & published to the World, one would not have thought, that so strange & inconsistent an Idea could have entered into the Mind of Man. Did ever a prudent Father refuse to cultivate the rising Genius of his Son through Fear, that finally he might be as great a Man as himself, and so despise his Father? Would it be thought an expedient Step for the Parliament of G. Britain to lay some peculiar Burdens upon the Trade of Liverpool, for instance, lest in some future Period it might vie with the City of London? One would rationally suppose, that a wise Governor would be equally pleased with the Prosperity of every Part of his Dominions, and that such Prosperity would equally contribute to his Glory and Power. It is impossible to conceive any future Period, in which America would not choose a Government on the Principles of the British Constitution; and almost as impossible to think of a Time, when the Power and Trade of this Country would not be necessary for it.

But even suppose, for Argument's Sake, that the last of these cases should, in any future time, happen; is it yet possible to suppose that America would wantonly detach herself from so mighty a Friend, whose Antiquity and Reputation would always dignify her, and who would continue to bear a great Part of the Expences in supporting her King—and that very King she must always chuse to be governed by? The very Idea is so absurd, that I take it for granted any Man who used it intends, as far as it is in his Power, to oppress America, and either to make the Inhabitants Slaves, or excite them to Rebellion. I remember Dr. Davenant,⁶ in writing upon this subject, says, that “nothing but such an *arbitrary* Power as shall make them *desperate*, can bring them to rebel.”

I would also enforce the Propriety of the Plan I have above proposed, from the Loss and Danger of obtaining the same End in any other way. Let us suppose that some Furiosos in Politics had their way, and that the Parliament should immediately proceed to enact Laws for the laying internal Taxes of any or every kind in the Colonies. Suppose also, what very lately happened, and therefore is not impossible, that they should refuse a Compliance;⁷ it then must be supposed, that, instead of the lenient and wise Measures adopted on the late Occasion, that a sufficient military Force from this Country was sent over to compel a Submission. Let Fire and Sword, and all the Desolations of War, run over that fair Continent. Let their large and populous Cities be knocked about their Ears; and let the *English Colonies* be fully & completely conquered by *English Troops*. What then? Why, an ample Proof is exhibited to all Nations under Heaven, that England, notwithstanding all the

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scandalous Insinuations to the contrary, has retained so much of her antient military Prowess, as to be able to subdue the whole Continent of No. America, although inhabited by a hardy Race of Men, sprung from its own Stock. And if she is able to conquer *her own People*; let *all others* continue to fear & tremble. Besides, it is supporting our antient Characteristic, that when we have none else to fight with, we will fight with one another.

But remember, they are *English Colonies* which have *fallen*; and those very Colonies too, by the Possession of which England has advanced from the Figure she made in the Days of Queen Elizabeth to her present Grandeur. America is fallen truly! but, as was said by a great Man the last Year, "she has fallen like a strong Man; she has embraced the Pillars of State," and perhaps will pull down the Constitution of this Country about her Ears. Her Fall has rendered a great Part of the Shipping of this Kingdom useless, has ruined many industrious Merchants, and reduced to Beggary *one half* of the Manufacturers; has raised Insurrections among the Distressed; and completely fitted this delightful Island for the *devouring Paw* of its envious Neighbours. I have greatly exceeded the Bounds I proposed to myself, and have yet left the Subject unfinished. It is so important and so animating, that I could write a Volume upon it. But now I have only to assure you, that I am,

Dear Sir,

Your most obedt. hble Servt.

RICHD. STOCKTON

1. For a discussion of Britain's economic problems and her efforts to obtain revenue from America, see Sec. I, introduction.
2. See Sec. I, Doc. 1.
3. The Currency Act of 1764.
4. The Revenue (Sugar) Act of 1764.
5. The proprietary colonies of Pennsylvania and Maryland.
6. Charles Davenant, author of the influential *True Picture of a Modern Whig* (1701).
7. The Stamp Act crisis of 1765-1766.

2 British Soldiers Riot in Elizabethtown

[*New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser*, August 6, 1767.]

Arriving in New Jersey in September 1766, the Twenty-eighth Regiment, a unit with a well-deserved reputation for troublesomeness, resided in the colony for nine months without incident. But just prior to its departure, trouble broke out when the regimental commander, Colonel John St. Clair, demanded that the