THE ARMY AND POLITICS

1783--1784

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INTRODUCTION

Wars and the men who fight them have for centuries been exalted by our Western culture as the most romantic aspect of masculine life. The increasing simililarity discovered by recent generations between the battlefield and the slaughterhouse is tending, however, to dull somewhat the old charm and luster of the passage at arms. As a consequence men are growing more interested in the analysis of the so-called military mind and its influence on the social and political scene. This thesis deals with the truly fascinating army formed by the American Revolutionary governments. The fascination arises partly from the variety of characters involved, partly from their varied social backgrounds, and partly from the simple historical fact that many went into the army with the attitudes of colonial civilians to emerge eight years later facing the uncertainties of a national existence.

The thesis picks up the story of the American army in the final months of the Revolution when officer and common soldier alike were having to face up to the problems raised by a return to civil life. For many who had grown accustomed to the routines of a military existence it was not a prospect to be eagerly embraced although it would be a canard to suggest that anything approaching a majority were not eager to forego the military way. Then it was that the men of the army came to an abrupt recognition that there were

very real causes for believing that the army would never receive a substantial part of the sums owed to it by the federal government. The result was the bringing to bear of strong pressures on Congress by the army, which in this case meant the officer class. In the pursuit of their ends the officers became involved in a political scheme of proportions just short of revolutionary. A few officers seem to have gone into the affair fully conscious of all the factors involved. Many more tagged along in blissful ignorance or disregard, valuing only the promise of financial rewards. A small group stood apart and deprecated the involvement of the military in civil affairs.

Despite the failure of the plot which culminated in the Newburgh Addresses, the officers did not abandon the political scene. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they could not do so. As a class they had identified themselves with the proponents of a strong central government and they thereby fell afoul of a fierce popular antagonism in particularistic New England. Troubles never coming singly, the army officers were soon widely denounced by many who had been their friends before the existence of the supposedly sinister Society of the Cincinnati was "exposed". The storm grew so ominous that Washington himself took the initiative in framing a virtual promise to the American people that the army officers as a collective body would not interfere with the polity of the nation.

An apology would seem to be in order for the title of

the thesis. More accurate would have been something such as THE ARMY OFFICERS AND POLITICS, 1783-1784, for the overwhelming interest has been in the attitudes and actions of the officers, not the common soldiers. In part that favoritism developed naturally enough from the paucity of materials relating to the buck private and non-com in contrasts with the considerable quantity dealing with the officers. Much the more important determinants, however, were the vigor and wide extent of officer activities as well as the very considerable cohesiveness and unity of the officers as a social group.

CHAPTER I

THE ARMY AND CONGRESS

The decline in the financial capacities of both Congressional and State governments after the year 1778 bore especially hard on the soldiers and officers of the American army. To mollify the latter group Congress took under consideration and finally adopted a pension plan eagerly favored by the military officers, whereby those officers serving to the conclusion of the war would receive after retirement an annual payment equal to one-half their regular pay each year for the remainder of their lives.

The concept of a retirement pension for the military was not wholly novel to Americans. Britain had incorporated the half-pay pension into her army pay schedules as early as 1697-1698.[1] Even Congress itself had enacted 26 August 1776, at the urging of many prominent citizens and officials, a bill promising half-pay for life to any officer, soldier, or sailor disabled so severely as to be unable to earn a livelihood.[2] Although this act of 1776 has gone down in history as the first national pension law of the United States, it was framed in such a fashion as to make the invalided soldier dependent not on Congress but on his State government. For Congress in writing the statute merely

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1. William H. Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States (New York, 1918), 12.

2. Journals of the Continental Congress, (34 vols., Washington, 1909-1928), 5:702-705. Hereafter referred to as JCC.

recommended to the states that they establish the pension system for their own troops. Recommendations from Congress proved insufficient, for most states performed the necessary administrative duties in a very imperfect manner.[3]

To reward men irretrievably wrecked by the wounds of war was one thing; to endow the same benefits upon officers who emerged from the war with whole and able bodies was quite another. That was a popular though not necessarily dominant attitude in America throughout the war. Some lips voiced antagonism to the officers' pension in simple phrases adding up to the idea that the men under arms deserved no special consideration. The officer earned his regular pay and no more. Men of education and refined sensibilities who opposed the pension tended to place their reasons on the loftier planes of human psychology, the state of the nation present and future, and the nature of republican government. Elbridge Gerry recited these objections as the principle ones in a letter to Washington: "the infant State of the country, its aversion to placemen and pensioners, whereby Great Britain is likely to lose her liberty, the equality of the officers and soldiers of some States, before the war, and the bad effect that such provision would have on the minds of the latter."[4] To that list might be added those put

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3. Glasson, Pensions, 19-21.

4. Gerry to Washington, 13 January 1778, quoted in Louis Clinton Hatch, The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army (New York, 1904, 79.

forward by the Governor of New Jersey: "It is a very pernicious precedent in Republican States; will load us with an immense debt, and render the pensioners themselves in a great measure useless to their country."[5]

The Congress that sat in the spring of 1778 was not unimpressed by the arguments against the pension plan. The delegates of four states, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and South Carolina originally opposed any pension plan, while those representing Massachusetts and New York were unwilling to meet in full the wishes of the officers for half-pay for life. The president of Congress, Laurens of South Carolina, damned the pension legislation as being inconsistent with the original compact made between the officer and the government when the former entered into the service. In the extremity of his wrath he warned that true republicans might have to give way at the moment to what seemed extortion but that the future would see repudiation.[6] "Extortion" was an unnecessarily harsh but not completely inaccurate word to describe the method practiced on Congress by the army through the Commander-in-Chief. As Washington urged it, the problem was as simple as this: the officer corps was in danger of disintegration, "your Officers will moulder to nothing or be composed of low and illiterate men" unless their commissions be made honorable and rewarding;

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5. Livingston to Laurens, 27 April 1778, ibid., 155n.

6. Ibid., 81-82.

this the half-pay pension would do.[7] Enough of the adamant New England group finally softened to the pleas for harmony and accepted a compromise by which properly qualified officers were to receive the half-pay for seven years.[8] Enacted into law, 15 May 1778, the seven year plan won the admission from Washington that though it was not equal to his wishes, it did exceed his expectations.[9] Actually the grant did not satisfy either the public or the officers.[10] No enduring solution had been found.

During 1779 the matter of half-pay for life was revived by the army officers. Again Washington lent the full prestige of his person and office to forward the wishes of the Army. Probably no year during the whole war saw the soldiers and officers so bereft of elementary creature comforts as 1780. For the desperate officers Congress provided a brighter picture of the future when on 21 October of that year voted half-pay for life to all officers who should serve throughout the war.[11] The act did not pass without the weak

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7. Washington to the President of Congress and to John Banister, 10 and 21, April 1778. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington, (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), 11:237, 285-286.

8. Only James Lovell of Massachusetts and Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut voted against the half-pay reselve of 15 May 1778. Hatch, Administration, 84. JCC 11:502-503.

9. Washington to Gouverneur Morris, 18 May 1778. Writings of Washington, 11:413.

10. Hatch, Administration, 84.

11. JCC, 13:948-961. Once again the opposition was mainly from New England, the Massachusetts and Connecticut delegations being solidly opposed.

and scattered opposition prophesying that the states would be antagonized and refuse to support the act. Congress decided to run that risk in preference to gambling with mass resignations in the army. The officers had at last been proffered that which they had long maintained to be a just reward.

But this Congressional act like its forerunner of 15 May 1778 was but a promise and no more. Its true value would depend directly on the ability of Congress to convince the individual states that the bargain between Congress and officers should be lived up to. For Congress itself had no independent source of revenue. Until the Constitution of 1789 was made the law of the land, Congress could get funds only through sales of western lands and, much more important, through requisitions on the states and foreign borrowing. The last method was, of course, only a stop-gap procedure dependent for repayment on the other two sources of revenue. Thus Congress in its legislative capacities had not only to weigh the intrinsic merits of matters on which it was acting but also to consider state attitudes, for the central government under the Articles of Confederation had no coercive power to compel delinquent states. Exhortation and pleading were the only weapons in the Congressional armory.

The success of American arms at Yorktown in the fall of 1781 marked the virtual end of campaigning in the Northern states. By early spring the continental line troops of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey

had settled down in the various small camps and posts scattered through the Hudson highlands. The headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, General George Washington, was at Newburgh. The Rhode Island line was detached from its fellow New Englanders during most of the 1782-1783 period to do police duty in the troubled hills of Vermont where the rival claims of Yorkers and New Englanders often led to violence. Part of the Pennsylvania line returned after Yorktown to its native state to garrison key military posts in the interior while the rest of this line bolstered the thin arrays of the Southern states in the difficult struggle to oust the British from the Carolinas. There, active battling continued the order of the day almost until the evacuation of Charlestown in December of 1782.

Unrest and dissatisfaction were not long in making an appearance among the Eastern troops in the Hudson River Cantonments. In July 1782 the officers of the Massachusetts line decided to present their complaints and demands to the civil government.[12] A definite guarantee of the promised half-pay for life, or a reasonable commutation of it in a lump sum was uppermost in the minds of the officers. Which was the proper government to turn to, Congress or the state? To be sure Congress had made the grant but the appropriation which would make good the promise was still lacking. The liklihood of getting nine state delegations in Congress, the

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12. Hatch, Administration, 143.

number needed for the passage of any appropriation, to agree on definite steps to implement the half-pay resolve was weak. The attendance record at Congress seldom saw more than eleven states represented at any one time. Moreover the opposition to the half-pay granted by Congress continued strong in New England. On the other hand, reasoned the Massachusetts officers, the sentiments in their home state might become more friendly if the state of Massachusetts itself were applied to for a state assumption of all money owing to the Massachusetts line.[13]

The petition drawn up by the Massachusetts officers in July 1782 was carried to the General Court at Boston by an officer delegation composed of Colonels Brooks, Hull and Putnam, the latter soon to become a general. The officers' wish to head the delegation with General Henry Knox was denied by Washington on the grounds that Knox could not be spared.[14]

The officer delegation was favorably received by several important civil leaders including John Hancock. In the General Court there was evident a sharp difference of opinion. The Senate, which drew its membership largely from the wealthier and more aristocratic element in society, favored the officers. The House of Representatives, on the other hand, looked askance at the idea of half-pay in any shape or form whether paid directly by the state to its own

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13. Hatch, Administration
14. Ibid., 144.

line or indirectly through Congress to the continental army as a whole. By upwards of four to one the representatives were opposed to the idea. Especially virulent was the antagonism shown to the officer plan by the spokesmen for the country districts.[15] Their constituents were mainly small farmers whose confirmed opposition in 1783-1784 to the officers demands will receive extended treatment in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Although such opposition and sentiment foredoomed the half-pay or commutation pleas, the petition was not given its quietus until the contents of a private letter written by Samuel Osgood, a Massachusetts delegate at Congress, were revealed. Osgood warned that Massachusetts would place herself in a dubious financial position if she should assume the burden of paying her officers' half-pay pension.[16] For, explained Osgood in a later letter[17] to General Knox, many delegates in Congress were determined that if a state were to take that step, the state should not therefore be released from the requirement of paying its full quota on Congressional requisitions. Consequently, Osgood went on, although personally in favor of state assumption of the half-pay, he felt it to be an unwise move until Congress should

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15. Hatch, Administration. 145.

16. Ibid.

17. Edmund E. Burnett, ed., Letters of Members of the Continental Congress (8 vols., Washington, 1921-1936), 6:553. Hereafter referred to as LMCC.

report favorably on state assumption.

The refusal of the Massachusetts General Court to take action on the officers' petition dropped a pall over the Hudson River Cantonment. Discontent was everywhere in the officers' quarters in November.[18] Many of the officers, probably a majority, had counted on the half-pay being transformed into a tangible reality of either certificates or specie by state action. Faith in Congressional ability had long been low since there was general acceptance by the army of the story that some members of Congress believed the half-pay resolves were only agreements forced upon Congress and hence were not to be considered binding.[19]

No longer was the unhappiness of the army attributable in large part to dire inadequacies of clothing, food, and shelter. To be sure, the pinch-penny procedures of the Quarter Master Department under Pickering still were in force. Nevertheless, clothing and food were in good supply; physical comfort was higher than at any previous time during the war.[20] Of course the persistent failure of the civil government to pay regularly and to settle up for extensive sums of back pay was sufficient at any time during the war to cause unrest. What changed discontent into positive

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18. Shaw to his father, 13 November 1782, Josiah Quincy, The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw...with a Life of the Author (Boston, 1847), 98.

19. Ibid.

20. Silas Goodell to Joshua Huntington, 11 November 1782, Huntington Papers, (Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, vol. 20, Hartford, 1923), 166. Hatch Administration, 42. Salem Gazette, 30 Jan. 1783.

forms of action was the growing awareness that the course of the war was running to an end. A sense of emergency informed every proceeding of the officers. They knew full well the hard core of truth in this ironical arithmetic problem: "If an officer on full pay receives nothing; what is one on half-pay to receive?"[21]

Although the Northern troops because of their great numbers and close proximity one to another spearheaded the most important attempts to achieve the demands of the army, the same fractious spirit was manifested by officer and soldier wherever the military were inactive and ample leisure gave time to ponder grievances. In this same month of November the small establishment of Virginia troops came to the very edge of mutiny at their home barracks in Winchester before General Muhlenberg throttled the insurgent movement with severe and summary punishment.[22]

In the main camp on the Hudson the officers, stung by the Massachusetts rebuff, contemplated during October and November two modes of protest. The more insidious one, if carried through, might conceivably have jeopardized the peace proceedings; for it called for a sort of cumulative strike wherein the officers would resign in a swelling stream until Congress should be forced to take action.[23] Washington had feared some such maneuver as early as October when he

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21. Pennsylvania Packet, 10 December 1782.

22. Henry A. Muhlenberg, The Life of Major-General Peter Muhlenberg...(Philadelphia, 1849), 287.

23. Writings of Washington, 25:430.

made the decision to forego a winter's leave at his home in Virginia in order, as he phrased it, "to stick very close to the troops this Winter and to try like a careful physician to prevent if possible the disorders getting to an incurable height."[24] Washington worked persistently to channel the officer unrest into another petition, this one to be addressed to Congress.

As earlier, the lead was taken by the Massachusetts regiments. In November each regiment from the Bay State drew up a list of grievances and incorporated them into bitter remonstrances.[25] The varying quality of rhetoric gave a certain individuality to each remonstrance, yet the bitter kernel of each was the same: past delays in paying troops made necessary an immediate payment of a certain sum, usually set at three months pay, with a fixed date of payment; interest-bearing certificates issued by Massachusetts to compensate the soldier and officer for pay lost due to depreciation during the period 1777-1780 had in turn depreciated to as much as one-third to one-quarter of face value so that the men suffered while the state itself was receiving full credit from the central government for such payments; money payments in lieu of extra rations due all officers were inadequate; no assurance had been given that the half-pay resolve would be implemented. In addition, most remonstrances gave some space to the tribulations peculiar

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24. Washington to McHenry, 17 Oct. 1782, ibid., 25:269-270.

25. Hatch, Administration, 147-149.

to the private soldier and non-commissioned officers.

Addressing, as they were, civil officers largely nurtured in a world of business and law where the instrument of the contract possessed a sacrosanct quality, the military officers tended to stress the contractual nature of their army commissions.[26] Surely, said the officers, our obligations under the contract to defend this nation with our arms, and if need be with our lives, have been faithfully carried out. Why then has the public, as the other contracting party, failed to keep its side of the bargain, or, at the least, manifested a serious intent to do so. We are not slaves, and we will not be bound by a contract where the other party displays bad faith. The officers spoke a language well adapted for theoretical argument with revolutionary governments whose much trumpeted philosophical justification rested on the right of an aggrieved party to dissolve a social contract.

These remonstrances provided a sort of platform or banner around which all the officers of the lines in the Cantonment area were asked to rally by the Massachusetts officers. An officer delegation representative of all the lines met on 24 November and selected these officers to a committee to draft an 'address and petition' to Congress embodying the complaints of the officer class: Major

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26. See, for example, the remonstrance of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment as quoted in Hatch, Administration, 149.

General Knox, Colonels Crane and Courtlandt, and Doctor Eustis.[27] The address was drawn up by Knox,[28] provisionally accepted by the assembly of officer delegates on the first day of December, then circulated among the various lines to assure solid support; after which the address was signed 7 December by representatives of all the lines in the Hudson River Area.[29] The signatures of six Massachusetts officers, including Knox and Brigadier General Patterson, headed the list, followed by five from the Connecticut line with Brigadier General Jedediah Huntington the most prominent name; the New York, New Jersey, and New Hampshire lines each provided only one signer, Colonel Courtlandt, Lieutenant Colonel Cummings, and Major Scott respectively; the hospital was represented by one Doctor William Eustis from Massachusetts who seems to have been involved constantly in officer movements of this period. Two days before the signing the officers elected three of their number as delegates to carry their address to Congress; General McDougall of New York, Colonel Brooks of Massachusetts, and Colonel Ogden of New Jersey.

The address[30] stuck closely to the argument of dis-

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27. Shaw to Rev. Elliot, April 1783, Quincy, Shaw, 102.

28. Francis S. Drake, Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox (Boston, 1873), 76.

29. Quincy, Shaw, 102.

30. A copy of the "address and petition" is to be found in JCC, 24:291-293.

tress and the necessity of being paid. The political overtones were slight. Years of service, said the address, had been given to the country, great sufferings had been borne; yet the army had received no adequate compensation so that conditions had at last become intolerable. "In this exigence, we apply to Congress...as our head and sovereign." The pay settlements made by the states had high enough nominal value but their worth was little. "We complain that shadows have been offered to us while the substance has been gleaned by others." The citizens murmur at the greatness of their taxes, yet the army gets nothing. "The numerous demands, which are between the first collectors and the soldiers, swallow up the whole." "A supply of money" must be sent to the army as soon as possible, for "further experiments on their patience may have fatal effects." Then the address went on to detail the specific monetary grievances of the officers. The money received in lieu of rations and clothing had been less than promised. All back pay still owing should be adjusted. As much as possible of that sum should be paid at once "and the remainder put on such a footing as will restore cheerfulness to the army, revive confidence in the justice and generosity of its constituents, and contribute to the very desirable effect of reestablishing public credit." Lastly, the address pointed to the sad condition of the deranged officers, that is, the officers who had been retired from the service when various reorganizations of the Continental line had rendered them surplus. By a law of 1780, officers subsequently to be

deranged were entitled to half-pay. But, said the address, they have not only received nothing but have become "the objects of obloquy. Their condition has a very discouraging aspect on us who must sooner or later retire, and from every consideration of justice, gratitude and policy, demands attention and redress." That the embittered cry of "pensioner" in several states may be stilled and that harmony may be established throughout the nation, the address agreed to accept a commutation of the half-pay or a sum in gross "as shall be agreed to by the committee sent with this address." In behalf of the common soldier, the address asked, that a definite system be established for eventual payment of the eighty dollars bounty promised to all soldiers who should serve to the end of the war. In conclusion, the address entreated that Congress, "to convince the army and the world that the independence of America shall not be placed on the ruin of any particular class of her citizens, will point out a mode for immediate redress."

After some delay due to difficulties in raising the money necessary to pay for the delegation's trip to Philadelphia where Congress was in session, the chosen three left camp on the twenty-third of December. Everyone left behind, "from the drummer to the highest officers," was uneasy, anxious for some pay. Both Washington[31] and Knox[32] wrote ahead

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31. Washington to Joseph Jones, 14 December 1782, Writings of Washington, 25:430-431.

32. Knox to Lincoln, 20 December 1782, Drake, Knox, 77.

to influential friends in Philadelphia warning them, in the words of Knox, that the officers corps which previously had "stood between the lower order of the soldiery and the public" could not much longer be expected to play an indifferent role: "The utmost period of sufferance...has arrived (and) to lengthen it will undoubtedly occasion commotions." If the country were truly so poor as to be unable to raise money sufficient to pay the officers and men, wrote several officers[33] in camp, the army would bear its cross quietly and without rancor. But to see large sums raised to carry on the war, and to watch the civil officers being adequately if not regularly paid while the army got next to nothing--that was beyond endurance. Who could blame the average soldier and officer for thinking invidious distinctions were being made in the allotment of public funds?

The news from Philadelphia was not all heartening. Benjamin Lincoln, Secretary at War, informed Knox that Congress had no money, had little chance of acquiring an independent source of revenue, and had too few votes to put through an appropriation sufficient to take care of the promised half-pay.[34] The half-pay resolve of Congress, he concluded, could have future value only if Congress referred the matter to the separate states. To Lincoln the states

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33. In addition to the above cited letters of Washington and Knox see also Quincy, Shaw, 99-100. Shaw to Rev. Elliot, 22 December 1782.

34. Henry Knox Paper (MHS), 10:129.

were not only the best bet, but the only one. Yet the same day he penned this letter to his fellow Bay States, the Secretary at War probably read in a local paper this dreary summary of state attitudes toward the half-pay:. "...some have absolutely resolved they will not give half-pay to their officers; others, who have been applied to, evade an answer, or say Congress have not recommended it to them; and others as yet, are willing to say nothing on the subject."[35]

In all liklihood the vast majority of the Eastern officers cared little whether their back-pay and half-pay came from Congress or the states. Though the rebuff by Massachusetts had rankled, most officers would probably have agreed with Knox when he acknowledged the justice of Lincoln's analysis of half-pay possibilities.[36] The army, who hoped to make their voice heard in the national chamber at Philadelphia through their "address and petition" and through their three man lobby, did not so much expect Congress to make the actual payments as they expected it to urge speedy action upon the states.

When the three man officer delegation left the Highlands on twenty-third of December 1782, they put behind themselves an uncomplicated scene of military protest and rode slowly forward into an involved drama.

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35. Pennsylvania Packet, 5 December 1782.

36. Knox to Lincoln, 20 December 1782, Drake, Knox, 77.

The money problem was the immediate cause of the welter of protests, plans, and intrigues which made the Congress sitting in the winter of 1782-1783 a small assembly of tired, distracted delegates. Better informed than the man in the street, they knew peace was probably not far distant. And with the war at an end, it was commonly believed that the negligible sources of income directly and independently available to Congress had no likelihood of augmentation. To cope with a national debt not unlikely to approach the $50,000,000 mark,[37] Congress could rely only on the very unreliable requisition system. The large French loans and gifts which had been so necessary for the prosecution of the war could no longer be counted upon: Congress knew by the last months of 1782 that that source was rapidly drying up.[38] To bring into its own hands a substantial source of revenue, Congress in 1781 had asked the states to enact legislation vesting in Congress the power to levy a five per cent ad valorem impost duty on nearly all foreign goods for an indefinite number of years.[39] Of course the income from the impost would not have

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37. Madison to Randolph, 22 January 1783, LMCC, 7:21-22.

38. George Bancroft, History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States of America (2 vols., 2nd ed., New York, 1882), 1:41-42.

39. Allan Nevins, The American States During and After the Revolution, 1775-1789 (New York, 1924), 630.

been nearly sufficient to make Congress independent of the requisition system. Nevertheless such an income would have strengthened Congress's hand in its dealing with both foreign and domestic creditors, for then Congress would have been able to pledge a definite income towards the payment of the interest on the debt.

By October 1782 all the states but Georgia and Rhode Island had consented to invest Congress with the desired power, albeit several states hedged their agreement with minor stipulations.[40] Since the accession of all the states was necessary before the new system could be made effective, the unanimous rebuff given to the impost plan by the Rhode Island assembly on 1 November 1782 greatly agitated its Congressional proponents. A Congressional committee was quickly appointed and was just setting off on an anxious crusade to attempt the reform of the little delinquent when the disconcerting news arrived from the South that the assembly of the key state of Virginia had recanted on the impost in the first week of December.[41]

In the eyes of the nationalists, that is, the men desirous of strengthening the power of the central government, the need for a national funding program took on added urgency

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40. Allan Nevins, The American States During and After the Revolution, 1775-1789 (New York, 1924), ibid., 631.

41. Ibid., 632-633.

at the same time that the opportunity to effect it dimmed. For the Pennsylvania assembly in the winter of 1782 sent to Congress two memorials posing this horrendous dilemma: either Congress must take steps to satisfy its creditors in Pennsylvania or Pennsylvania would assume the job and deduct the necessary expenses from the state's contributions to the general revenue. The first was a manifest impossibility if the impost plan was unacceptable to the states, and the second would further weaken the authority of the central government. A Congressional committee including those two key nationalists, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison won from the Pennsylvania assembly a postponement of action.[42] But the promise of the state assembly to desist did not stop the individual public creditor of Pennsylvania from dinning his claims into Congressional ears, and it is to be remembered that the citizens of Pennsylvania held a greater part of the national debt than those of any other state.[43] So, all in all, members of Congress might with good reason have been "exceedingly embarrassed" as the old year gave way to the new.[44]

The arrival of the officer delegation was regretfully accepted by some members of Congress as one more

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42. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:42.

43. Ibid., 81.

44. S. Wharton to Delaware Council, 6 January 1783, LMCC, 7:2.

wearisome burden, but to others, who had watched with embittered eyes as all efforts to strengthen the national government at the expense of state autonomy failed, the army carried almost as simple and direct a solution as the sword Alexander wielded on the Gordian knot.

No time was lost by the army delegation in getting down to the brass tacks of lobbying. New Years' morning Colonel Brooks breakfasted with a member of Congress, Samuel Osgood.[45] And while those two men from Massachusetts talked things over, the other two officers in the delegation, McDougall and Ogden, likewise proceeded to visit individually and unofficially with other members of Congress. For the rest of the week the buttonholing went on to the end, McDougall insisted, that any member of Congress inclined to look unfavorably on the army's demands would nevertheless not slight the problem when introduced into the Congressional business.[46] From these tetes a tetes, the officers concluded that "a great majority of Congress...are seriously disposed to do everything in their power...for the fulfillment of all their engagements to the Army" but the money for present wants was admittedly lacking and as yet no permanent funds were available to secure the past and future debt due the army.[47] Yet, reported back McDougall to General Knox, the leader of the officer movement, most members were "rather

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45. S. Osgood to Lincoln, 1 January 1783, ibid.

46. McDougall to Knox, 9 January 1783, ibid., 7:14n.

47. Ibid.

pleased than otherwise" with the presentation of the address from the army.

McDougall had something considerably more important to offer in this letter to Knox than a mere progress report and statement of the financial difficulties harassing Congress. In effect he reopened the problem of over-all strategy. It has been seen that the trip of the three army officers and their memorial had their origins in the Massachusetts line; all evidence has also pointed to the liklihood that most New England officers were sufficiently political to be uninterested in all aspects of the problem save that of whether or not their pay would be forthcoming. To be sure the army memorial states that the application was made to Congress "as our head and sovereign."[48] That meant only that the army looked to Congress to start the ball rolling. Doubtless many officers' expectations went no further than a Congressional recommendation to the states to render full justice to their own officers and soldiers. What effect would such a recommendation have, queried McDougall rhetorically, on New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey, states where public opinion was notoriously antagonistic to the half-pay idea?[49] And if grim silence were the probable answer of those states, would Massachusetts and New York do much more? Perhaps

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48. JCC, 24:291.

49. LMCC, 7:14n.

the latter two states would pass laws but in all likelihood without setting up the necessary funds without which the legislation would have no practical value. Recognizing these unhappy probabilities, McDougall wondered what the army would think of this idea, "if it should be proposed.": "to unite the influence of Congress with that of the Army and the public creditors to obtain permanent funds for the United States which will promise most ultimate Security to the Army." In closing he recommended that Knox and General Huntington, the ranking Connecticut officer, ponder that strategy well, "as we (the officer delegation) may probably find it necessary to put the question to you and the officers" in order to govern the delegation's subsequent activities.

From the tentative way in which McDougall broached this proposal to an army largely composed of New Englanders, it was unlikely that the origin of the plan had substantial roots east of the Hudson. And from all available evidence the merits of a scheme to join, in some indefinite fashion, the army to the public creditors in order to put backbone into a tremulous Congress were first appreciated by a certain group in and about Congress. An early statement of

the idea is to be found in a letter[50] composed by General Arthur St. Clair in December and addressed to the officer delegation. St. Clair had been on an extended leave in Philadelphia from his military duties, in an effort to keep himself and family from utter destitution.[51] In November he had had several interviews with Robert Morris, whom St. Clair claimed as an old friend, in the course of which talks Morris had informed St. Clair that he, Morris, was making great efforts to get together "a handsome payment" for the army. About the plans of Morris, whatever they might then have been, nothing need here be said; but it is interesting to contemplate the strong possibility that the attitudes and suggestions in St. Clair's letters to the officer delegation derived from the writer's association with Robert Morris or the latter's assistant in the Office of Superintendent of Finance, Gouverneur Morris.

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50. William Henry Smith, ed., The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1882), 1:573-576. The letter was simply dated December 1782. Whether St. Clair wrote the letter to be presented personally to McDougall, Brooks, and Ogden when they should arrive in Philadelphia or whether he sent it up to the army camp in time to reach them before they departed is not clear. The former possibility seems the more fitting, since if the letter had been received prior to the delegation's departure, its piquant political suggestions would have made it unnecessary for McDougall to present them to Knox as a new approach to the officers' problems.

51. Smith, St. Clair Paper, 1:572. St. Clair to Washington 26 November 1782.

In the letter St. Clair took it upon himself, the ranking officer in the Pennsylvania line, to speak for its widely scattered officers and soldiers. The first point made was that the state of Pennsylvania had been as liberal in her attitude towards her line as could be hoped for, even going so far as to adopt as her own the Congressional resolve on half-pay. Nevertheless the Pennsylvania line had its hopes fixed on Congress and would not consider the United States freed from obligation if the state failed to make good on the half-pay grant. The Pennsylvania line, wrote St. Clair, wanted the national government to establish funds to secure the debt owing to the army. To achieve such security for the army debts, St. Clair went on, the idea of the army coalescing with other public creditors was "worthy of every serious consideration," By uniting army and civil creditors, the former would be assured of the latter's support. Congress further should be warned that, unless swift action be taken on present pay and sincere assurance given of continued prompt payment of current wages, there would be "every reason to expect a convulsion of the most dreadful nature and fatal consequences." Above all, St. Clair continued, "the whole army ought to throw themselves upon Congress," the true boss of the army, and not vitiate its total strength by permitting some lines to pay court to their state governments.

With the suggestion of a combination between army and civil creditors, St. Clair had transcended anything

written or implied in the officer memorial to Congress. He proceeded even further on this tack by an examination of the political realities underlying the total situation. The confederation, he said, was a very imperfect one, wherein Congress had no power and its individual members were too inclined to bend to the vagrant winds of "little local policy." Congress could be raised above that chaotic world if only the problem and solution of the army debts could "be thrown upon the continent at large" and the army kept together. Then Congress could speak with some degree of authority to any refractory state. If, on the other hand, some lines throw themselves upon Congress while others turn to their states, "Congress will want the power, and the states, I fear, will want the will." Perhaps fearing that he had taken a position too advanced to be palatable to New Englanders and too uncompromising to please his fellow Pennsylvanians, who, after all, might in the last extreme have to fall back solely on the charity of their hitherto benevolent state, St. Clair denied that his program would preclude a subsequent compromise between a state and its line. If the two parties should mutually agree that a lump sum payment by the state were desirable, then the state should be permitted to pay it and deduct a proportional amount from her quota to Congress. Indeed, in such a compromise resolution of the problem the officers would be in a much stronger bargaining position, he pointed out,

than if there were no Congressional plan in existence.

Another friend of Robert Morris's, Gouverneur Morris, unabashedly hailed the arrival of the army delegation.[52] For him, who probably loved few things more than the exciting ingredients of a good political plot, lest it be the lush words and phrases with which he delighted in describing the same, it was a heady moment. "The army have swords in their hands. You know enough," he wrote to John Jay in Paris, "of the history of mankind to know much more than I have said, and possibly much more than they (the army) themselves yet think of." Discount the dramatic innuendo, remember the insight into political factors often displayed in the past by Gouverneur Morris, and the message is clear: the army is aroused, and though its bitterness still lacks positive direction and critical discernment, that can be supplied. Morris was happy over the long hoped-for prospect which at last was coming near enough to be visualized clearly. Though "much of convulsions" would occur in the end, he had faith that "it must terminate in giving to government that power, without which government is but a name." And to this end he gratuitously pledged himself to do everything possible with the present opportunity.

Among the members of Congress no one felt more strongly the need for a strong central government than the

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52. G. Morris to J. Jay, 1 January 1783, Jared Sparks, The Life of Gouverneur Morris...(3 vols., Boston, 1832), 1:249.

extremely ambitious and competent Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton had interest and friends in both the American army and treasury. He had served in the army close to Washington. Returning to civil life in 1782 he had almost immediately received an appointment to Congress as a New York delegate. In Philadelphia he was close to Robert Morris with whom he had carried on a war-time correspondence largely revolving about fiscal matters and whose views on congressionally controlled revenues he heartily shared.[53] He, too, saw that the application of the army to Congress might be turned to "a good account."[54] The spectacle of an indignant army was helping to prove the inadequacy of the Confederation and proselytes to this opinion were increasing fast. In his pocket, Hamilton carried the resolutions voted by the New York legislature in July of 1782 recommending the creation of a general convention to take under advisement the feeble powers of Congress. Although the circumstances of January 1783 were favoring the introduction of this theme into Congress, Hamilton did not believe the time was yet ripe. Whether he feared the blooming promise of the army pressure might be blighted by a simultaneous push in behalf of a matter so partisan and controversial as a constitutional

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53. John C. Hamilton, The Life of Alexander Hamilton (2 vols., New York, 1834-1840), 2:40.

54. Hamilton to Governor Clinton, 12 January 1783, LMCC, 7:13-14.

convention is not known. It was not until April that Hamilton presented the resolutions to Congress.[55]

The other giant in Congress during the winter of 1782-1783 was young James Madison of Virginia. A firm proponent of a stronger central government, he nevertheless seems to have had no close connections with the Robert Morris-Hamilton group. Nor did Madison hail the dissatisfied army as a God-given instrument with which to effect fundamental changes in the Confederation. He did complain to his friends of the unfortunate position of Congress harassed on the one hand by its creditors seeking their just dues while on the other left with no resources, "even the resource of answering that everything which could have been done has been done."[56] Madison used the army only as a tragic symbol which he hoped would evoke sufficient sympathy in the continent at large and particularly in his own Virginia, whose apostasy on the impost duty grieved him much, to make possible the revitalization of national finances.[57]

The opposition to the nationalist group in Congress was placed in a most difficult position by the introduction

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55. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:104.

56. Madison to Governor Harrison, 7 January 1783, LMCC, 7:6. Madison to Randolph, 8 January 1783, ibid., 7:7.

57. Madison to Randolph 16, 22, 28 January 1783, ibid., 7:19, 21-22, 25-26.

of the army issue. With perhaps no exceptions both nationalists in Congress were sympathetic to the army plaints. But the anti-nationalists perforce appeared in an unsympathetic light because their desire for decentralized government would not permit them to approve the grant of independent revenues to Congress whereby the debts to the army might have been funded. The anti-nationalists found themselves in a most uncomfortable defensive role. The reactions of Arthur Lee, an outstanding anti-nationalist, upon his return to Congress in late January point up the unprepossessing ground held by his party.[58] "It is certainly a great misfortune to any Country," he wrote to Sam Adams, "that their army should be discontented, and the more so when they have reason on their side, as in the present case." What would Lee suggest be done to satisfy them? All he could do was affirm his belief that with peace the army debts would be provided for. In the meantime he felt sure that "a majority of the Army at least, will remember that they are citizens, and not lend themselves to the tory designs, as I verily believe this is, of subverting the Revolution."

The army memorial was officially laid before Congress, 6 January 1783, and Congress to indicate its good will towards the army referred the memorial to a grand

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58. A. Lee to S. Adams, 29 January 1783, ibid., 28.

committee wherein every state present in Congress would be represented.[59] The next evening the committee met, with Robert Morris present to give information and advice in his capacity as Superintendent of Finance.[60] Morris told the committee flatly that the present financial status of the government made it impossible to make any sizeable immediate payment to the army. And further, he warned that it would be imprudent to legislate any more promises to the army until definite funds were established. In other words, Congress's first job was a reorganization of finances, the problem of the army was secondary. Indeed, said Morris, even if an advance could be given, it would be a poor precedent for it would appear to the world as though the military had extracted the advance by their aggressive demands. Perhaps to save his picture from an overwhelming blackness Morris then announced that he had taken steps leading toward some payment to the army, steps which he could not disclose and which he had communicated only to Washington under an injunction of secrecy. Finally he declared that the affairs of his department were in a state so alarming that he was considering asking Congress to appoint a confidential committee to advise on steps to be

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59. JCC, 25:846.

60. Ibid., 847.

taken. It was a most somber report, but the suggested strategy is interesting, since it came from a leading nationalist. First, the army must be made to wait on a new financial set-up. Secondly, Congress should conduct itself as though uninfluenced by the army representatives. If Congress had tailored its ways after that design, the angry army might have been transformed into an insurrectionary force.

The next day, 8 January, Congress informed Pelatiah Webster and William Judd, who were representing the deranged officers of the Massachusetts and Connecticut lines respectively in their demands for Congressional action on the half-pay,[61] that it was inexpedient to make any partial arrangement while the whole problem of half-pay was being considered.[62] So that the identity of the villain might not be lost sight of the resolve concluded "that the memorialists be further informed that the States have not yet furnished them with funds for paying the half-pay due them." The author of the resolve was probably Colonel Theodorick Bland, an anti-nationalist, who, during the winter and spring of 1783, frequently found the logic of immediate problems forcing him to slight his political principles.

In the next few days Congress was enlightened further by Robert Morris on the dire state of national

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61. JCC, 43n.

62. Ibid., 24:43.

finances: the United States was overdrawn three and one-half million livres--should the Financier nevertheless continue to write drafts gambling on the success of John Adams' loan negotiations and France's past friendship?[63] Congress answered with a 'yes'. Later, on 13 January, Richard Peters, seconded by Madison, moved that despite weighty criticisms further loans must be sought from France because money must, if at all possible, be procured for the army.[64] Madison argued that further applications could not possibly worsen the existent situation; success was not unlikely since it was to France's benefit to see the American soldier and officer return to their homes with the knowledge that France had made possible their payment. Dyer, representing the strongly anti-nationalist state of Connecticut, was opposed to the motion because he believed it improper to augment further the national debt. Several nationalists gave only grudging approval, for, they said, they deprecated taking further advantage of France's friendship when the American states would not give Congress the permanent revenues with which to repay the debts. The motion carried, but the committee appointed that same day reported back to Congress on 17 January that after a conference with the Financier they were of the opinion that the applications on foot were all prudence would permit until proper funds should

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63. JCC, 25:848-849; 24:44.

64. Ibid., 25:850-851.

be established.[65] Again the insistence of the nationalists on the primacy of a system of permanent funds is to be noted. Congress then agreed to postpone further consideration of this report and to take it up later along with the forthcoming report on the army memorial which, as Madison commented, "would involve the same subject."

The first conference between the officer delegation and the grand committee and the Financier was scheduled for Friday evening, 10 January. Perhaps Robert Morris's peculiar advice to Congress not to appear to be influenced unduly by the army's demands had some influence, for the committee refused to hie itself to McDougall's quarters when Chairman Wolcott informed them that the general could not leave his room due to rheumatism but was very desirous of holding the meeting.[66] So it was not until the following Monday evening, 13 January that all the parties were able to get together.[67] McDougall, always the leader of the delegation, led off by stressing the three principal demands of the officers: an immediate payment of part of the sum due the army, adequate provision for the remainder, and half-pay. He expressed fear of the consequences if the army were again disappointed. The

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65. JCC, 857.

66. Ibid., 850.

67. Ibid., 851-853.

seeming approach of peace and the fear of even greater neglect by the government in the future when the army would no longer be needed plus "actual distresses" had forced the army to become active in its own behalf. Ogden and Brooks supplied the footnotes on the distresses of the army. In keeping with what seems to have been a settled policy of the deputation the officers hinted darkly of the army's probable reaction to the failure of their deputies. Ogden said he did not want to return as a "messenger of disappointment." When directly queried on the reaction of the army, the officers claimed it was impossible to say precisely but that some of the more intelligent non-coms and privates had been seen in "sequestered conversations." Moreover, they said, many of the lower ranking officers could no longer be counted on to aid in halting a mutiny. Part of the ill-will in the army was due, said the deputies, to the regularity with which civil officers were paid and to the general well-being of the civil society as a whole. On the conduct of some states in refusing to establish a federal revenue to pay off federal debts, the officers expressed both surprise and indignation. At that point in the evening's discussion, McDougall made a most interesting remark, with "a peculiar emphasis" noted Madison, that could well have been interpreted by the committeemen as a bid for a more intimate cooperation between Congress and the army. It was to the effect that the most intelligent part of the army were much distressed over the "debility and defects" of the federal government and the unwillingness of

the states "to cement and invigorate it" for a collapse of the union would probably deprive the officers of expected benefits. Reverting to the pay problem again the deputies supported their legal right to half-pay and condemned those people who stigmatized the officers as 'pensioners.' However, echoing their address, the officers announced their readiness to accept a commutation of the half-pay. With this remark on the half-pay, the deputies left the meeting, after which the grand committee appointed a sub-committee of Hamilton, Madison, and Rutledge of South Carolina to draw up a report in concert with Robert Morris on arrangements for the army.

The Monday evening conference made a deep impression on members of Congress. Madison wished that propriety would permit the remarks of the army deputies to be printed up and sent throughout the continent.[68] He was sure the contents would shame "all those who have laboured to throw a fallacious gloss over our public affairs." To other members more ebullient than Madison, but equally nationalist in ideology, events seemed to be moving rapidly to a climax where the baneful distresses would surely call forth changes in the nation's constitution.[69]

The committee report on the army memorial was ready and

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68. Madison to Randolph, 16 January 1783, LMCC, 7:19.

69. A. Nash to J. Iredell, 18 January 1783, ibid., 19.

delivered to Congress by 22 January.[70] But on the very day that Congress was to begin deliberations on the report, a brief, explosive letter was received from Robert Morris.[71] It announced his intention to resign. In the communication Morris said his attention to the public debts had derived from the belief that the last essential act of the revolution would be the funding of the public debts on solid revenues. That conviction had sustained him in the past but he had at last lost faith; he feared no such funds would be established and therefore he refused to continue to have a hand in the increase of the national debt while the prospect of paying it similtaneously declined. However, to avoid even greater chaos being induced into national affairs by a precipitate resignation on his part, Morris was prepared to continue at his post until the end of May. If by that time Congress should have done nothing to make permanent provision for all the public debts, a new Financier would have to be found. "I will never be the minister of injustice," he concluded.

What lay behind the profferred resignation, expertly timed to jar Congress on the very eve of its discussions on the army problem, was probably the need felt by Morris and perhaps by others belonging to the nationalist group, to

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70. O. Wolcott to M. Griswold, 22 January 1783, ibid., 20. JCC, 24:95n.

71. R. Morris to President of Congress, 24 January 1783, Francis Wharton, ed., The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States (6 vols., Washington, 1889), 6:228-229.

increase the pressure on Congress to the point where any hesitant member would at last lose indecision and accept the doctrine of permanent funds for the national government.[72] As expected, Congress was deeply unsettled.[73] A multitude of fears rose up. Domestic and foreign credit, already greatly enfeebled, might be irretrievably lost. The army might mutiny. The enemy might take new hope. Would any capable person step forward to fill the vacated post as Superintendent of Finance? In the hour of emergency, certain members of Congress who were generally sympathetic to the army's demands and to the nationalist funding program but who had no intimate connection with the Morris-Hamilton group, partially dulled the effect of Morris's announcement. For the latter's plan required the publication of his letter so that the voices of the army and public creditors generally might become even more stentorian.[74] Madison combatted James Wilson, Pennsylvania member and good friend of Morris,[75] when Wilson tried to persuade Congress to consider the letter openly, a move which probably would have led to full publicity throughout the land and to an eventual solicitation by Congress that

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72. Ellis Paxon Oberholtzer, Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier (New York, 1903), 195-196. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:80.

73. JCC, 25:862.

74. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:80.

75. Oberholtzer, Robert Morris, 283.

Morris continue in office.[76] Madison maintained that Congressional dignity should not be demeaned by a resort to bargaining. He deliberately counselled against the release of the news to the public even though he recognized the propaganda value that the letter's publicity would have in the struggle for the funding program which he strongly favored. Congress followed Madison's advice. A promise of secrecy was obtained from Morris, and a crisis in national affairs was temporarily averted.

The report on the army memorial was drawn up by Hamilton.[77] The officers' complaints on the pay situation, Hamilton analyzed into five parts. The last two, dealing with deficient compensation for rations and clothing were of relatively minor importance and entered little into Congressional business. On the first question of some immediate pay, there was no opposition to the resolve that the Superintendent of Finances make a payment as soon as possible of as much money as the state of public finances would permit.[78] Morris agreed, Congress was told, to make speedy payment of one month's pay. Morris had taken such steps even before the army memorial was presented to Congress, and Hamilton worded this resolution so that there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that it was not the pressure of the army which had won

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76. JCC, 25:862.

77. Ibid., 862.

78. Ibid., 24:863-864; 25:93.

the payment.[79] Hamilton's next resolve touched on the large arrears of pay. It ordered that the states settle accounts with their own lines up to August 1780 while the Superintendent of Finance was ordered to take the necessary measures to effect the settlement after that date. All the New England delegates except those of Connecticut were in favor of substituting December for August because their states had settled with their lines down to a later period than August and they wanted to insure being credited by the central government for that outlay.[80] The eight other states present in Congress were successful in keeping the August date.[81]

With the next resolve suggested in Hamilton's report Congress entered into controversial matters that were to bedevil its proceedings for many days and to increase in some states a bitter hostility toward Congressional measures. This resolve acknowledged that the army had a right, "in common with all the creditors," to definite security for the certificates the army would receive in recognition of their pay arrears; further, the resolve obliged Congress to make every effort "in their power" to secure from the states

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79. JCC, ibid., 25:864. On 5 February Morris issued warrants whereby officers received one month's pay in notes and the enlisted men in weekly installments of a half dollar. The total issue amounted to $253,232.86. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:81.

80. JCC, 25:864.

81. Ibid., 24:93-94; 25:865.

"substantial" funds adequate for funding the whole national debt. To accomplish this promise, the resolve called for Congress to enter immediately into a full discussion of funds and revenues.[82] Congress had at last come to the outskirts of the central problem, led that way by the leading nationalists spokesman, Alexander Hamilton. It "was considered a very solemn point, and basis of the plans by which the public engagements were to be fulfilled and the Union cemented," Madison noted.[83]

Colonel Bland of the Virginia delegation, wished to insert the phrase, "consistent with the Article of Confederation" after the word "power" in the clause, "Congress will make every effort in their power to obtain from the respective states general and substantial funds." Bland explained that he did not want to rule out methods not included in the Articles but merely to give precedence to constitutional modes. Arnold of Rhode Island, representing the most resolutely anti-nationalist state in the union, eagerly seconded the motion. The majority of Congress was discomfited by this move and adjourned.[84] The next day, 25 January, Bland's motion was probably never mentioned, although consideration of the resolve was resumed. Gorham, from Massachusetts, evidenced qualms about the sweep of the phrase "general and substantial funds." Congress upheld him, and the words

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82. JCC, .. 24:94-95.

83. Ibid., 25:864.

84. Ibid.

"general and" were deleted. In this form the resolve passed unanimously,[85] thus setting the stage for James Wilson to move that consideration of funds begin the following Monday, 27 January.

Before adjourning for the week-end, however, Congress gave attention to the last of the resolves urged in the Hamilton report on the army memorial. This resolve would have permitted the officers the option of retaining their claim to half-pay or accepting in lieu therof a sum in commutation to be paid within one year after the conclusion of the war, either in money or "placed upon good funded security bearing an annual interest of six per cent."[86] Argument was first joined over the question of what an adequate commutation would be.[87] Hamilton argued for a sum equal to six years full pay. The Eastern delegates, joined by New Jersey, would not accept such a large sum, turning a deaf ear to the plea that Congress should be liberal in its commutation terms lest the officers refuse the plan. Neither party in Congress was yet prepared for a showdown, so the question of a fair commutation arrangement was handed over to a committee of five.

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85. JCC, ibid., 865. The resolve as printed in JCC 24:94, does not show the words "general and" but from Madison's notes, it is apparent that the resolve originally contained this more extensive phraseology.

86. Ibid., 24:95

87. Ibid., 25:865

A few days later, 4 February, the question was revived with a motion calling for a commutation equal to five years full pay.[88] Once again the three Eastern states, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut were joined by New Jersey in voting "no." When it seemed likely that more proposals of a very similar nature would be immediately forthcoming, Wolcott and Dyer of Connecticut quickly followed by Arnold of Rhode Island remarked that they were bound by instructions from their states on this subject. Therefore their votes would not be changed as a result of any minor amendments. The trouble lay not in the details but in the very idea of half-pay or a commutation thereof. They called into doubt the validity of the half-pay resolve of October 1780 since it had been passed before the Articles of Confederation became law and because the resolve had passed by the votes of less than seven states. These criticisms must have appeared most captious to many listeners. Madison pointed out that the resolve had been passed according to the rules then obtaining. Wilson expressed surprise that a state would instruct its delegates to work against the performance of the lawful engagements of Congress. The latter rebuttal had emotional value alone, for Rhode Island or any other state had an obvious right to change its mind and go into

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88. JCC, 889.

opposition to a law which it had originally helped to enact. Such knuckle-rapping served only to antagonize the anti-commutation bloc, and to strengthen that bloc's belief that they were gallant champions of political liberties.[89] Gilman of New Hampshire put forward the sole alternative plan for commutation capable of getting the anti-nationalist vote when he proposed that the officers be referred to their separate states for compensation.[90] The proposition had no chance of winning acceptance as its supporters knew well.[91] The powerful nationalist group was grimly resolved to keep the army pay problem ticking along. The army was to be the machine which would eventually batter down the walls, permitting the nationalists to gain effective control over the nation through the erection of a strong national government.

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89. Rhode Island Delegates to the Governor of Rhode Island, 4 February 1783, LMCC, 7:29-30.

90. JCC, 25:889-890.

91. LMCC, 7:30.

CHAPTER II

THE NEWBURGH AFFAIR

Before launching into the detailed story of the role played by the Revolutionary army officer on the American political scene during the Spring of 1783, it will be well to fix in our minds a clear idea of the larger picture. When James Wilson opened the discussion of ways and means to assure to the national government "adequate and substantial funds" on which to secure the national debt, he set Congress moving along a tortuous path that did not take an important turn until the Congressional resolution of 18 April, 1783.[1] This resolution represented a compromise between the extreme demands put forward on the one hand by the nationalist group who wanted the national debt completely provided for by funds under the direct control of Congress, and on the other hand by the particularists who wished to keep the Congressional government subordinate to the individual states on matters of finance. By the terms of the resolution Congress was to receive an independent income from a five per cent impost duty: that provision was a victory for the nationalists. But since the estimated revenue from an impost fell well below the sum necessary to provide for the whole national debt, other sources of income had to be tapped. At that point the particularists were able to force the nationalists to agree to seek the

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1. JCC, 24:257-262.

necessary supplemental funds through the method prescribed by the Articles of Confederation. In other words the supplementary funds were to come from requisitions laid on the states by Congress: it was the old procedure so detested by the nationalists because of the independent power it left at the disposal of the individual states.

The issues and arguments propounded in Congress during the Spring of 1783 were clothed substantially in financial terms. Yet it would be a great mistake to forget that in all minds, whether nationalist or particularist, the great over-shadowing issue was always the amount of political power to be vested in the national government. That is not to say that the financial struggle was merely symbolical or just an unimportant side issue, but most assuredly it was only one battle in a war of long duration. The thoughts of the nationalist leaders never strayed far from the big questions. Could the federal assembly continue to exist when the centripetal force of war would no longer operate? And even if a Congress of sorts could persist, would it ever be possible to give it the powers necessary to render it a government supreme over thirteen states? And on the other hand, if Congress finally be dissolved, what then would be the consequences?[2] The conclusion to be drawn is that the nationalists worked

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2. Luzerne to Vergennes, 6 February 1783, Bancroft, Formation of the Constitution, 1:293-295.

assiduously to make their financial system the foundation stone for a new powerful national government. To push that cumbersome stone into place some nationalists were willing to use all available workmen. As we have seen, the officers of the army potentially provided such a labor force. And, if the officers backed by the army proved so effective, so threateningly powerful that not only the new financial system would be swallowed by the nation at large but also a new strongly centralized form of government, that would be so much the better thought some nationalists.[3]

All figures of speech contain a measure of inaccuracy, but to compare the army officers to a labor force and to picture a certain nationalist group in and about Congress as their prospective employers does emphasize admirably a certain notable characteristic of the American army at that moment in history: collectively, though with several shining exceptions, the army officers had a minimum of understanding and interest in the basic political question as to whether or not the American government should be national or federal. Like most workers, the average army officer concerned himself only with his wage. What the political extrapolations of his conduct might be, bothered him little if he comprehended them at all. Our analogy has, however,

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3. Extract from Sir Guy Cartleton's dispatch #60, 15 March 1783, ibid., 298-300.

a certain weakness: it is unnecessary to propagandize the worker before getting him to do the job but it was imperative that the nationalist group convince the officers of two things. First, the individual states would not render full justice to the soldier. Second, the national government could and would honor all obligations to the army if the army would unflinchingly support the nationalist system of finances. Another limp in our analogy is to be seen in the use of the word 'job'. Where a worker's job is relatively clear-cut and capable of a well-defined mode of operation, the job given to the army not only had no blueprint but its very nature was never defined except in ambiguous terms.

The story proper evidently began in December of 1782 or in the following month when the officer delegation arrived in Philadelphia. All the available materials, as has been seen, point to a working agreement being reached between the three representatives of the officers and a civilian group dominated by the two Morrises and Hamilton. Unfortunately the evidence is not so complete as to permit a clear-cut and sure assertion of the active participation of these or any other civilians in the machinations of the officer corps. The reason for this slight uncertainty is simple. The alliance was dangerous both to its participants and to the country because a complete and premature exposure might instantly have wrecked the Confederation or,

at the least, so angered all anti-nationalists and probably even many nationalists as in all liklihood to have made impossible any attempts to bolster Congressional powers in the immediate future. Moreover, the plan seems to have verged on the revolutionary, or, perhaps it would be better to say that the execution of the plan was bound to make America a more fertile ground for an internal political revolution. No wonder then that many of the faces and events, particularly those concerning the civilian clique, have escaped positive identification. The participants acted as plotters, and plotters invariably move in secret ways.[4]

The question naturally arises, relative to the bargain made in Philadelphia by the delegation, as to their authority to so act. Their instructions were broad and vague empowering them to present the memorial and to work for its adoption. But only an unusual construction of even

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4. E. G. McDougall not only corresponded under his own name, as when he was sending back to the army his reports on the progress of his mission, but he also hid beneath the signature of "Brutus" when he wrote confidentially. This identification of the conspiratorial McDougall is established in William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene (2 vols., Charleston, 1822), 2:394n. Even more suggestive than this positive evidence, which after all must be admitted to be a not too exceptional performance in a time when no well-dressed controversialist was without his classical pseudonym, is the almost total absence of identifying references to fellow-workers or to the actual steps taken to forward the grand design.

that indeterminate authorization would encompass a secret alliance with a non-military group. Very likely, then, the officer corps in general had no knowledge of such a move. There is the possibility that General Knox, the acknowledged leader of the movement which gave birth to both the memorial and the delegation, did in the beginning expect that the delegation would have to resort to some sort of sub rosa deal in its attempts to further the army's cause.[5] As last as 7 February, and possibly even later, those behind the plan in Philadelphia believed Knox would be friendly to such a maneuver.[6] But Knox stayed aloof from the full-blown plot despite the steady and persuasive correspondence that Gouverneur Morris maintained with him until the very eve of the Newburgh Affair in the second week of March. Besides Knox the only other officer in the army whose military position was such that he might be considered able to speak for the whole officer corps was Washington; and he was viewed by the Philadelphia group

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5. Why else would Knox have agreed to receive letters from McDougall signed "Brutus" in which McDougall considered problems of strategy judged unfit for the minds of the average officer?

6. In a letter of that date Hamilton wrote to Washington that Knox "may be safely made use of" by Washington in the execution of a policy that Hamilton had suggested to Washington. Considering the fact that a basic principle of the plan hatched in Philadelphia was to render Washington powerless, it does not seem farfetched to conclude that Hamilton in this particular letter was actually trying to get Washington to tail along behind Knox. LMCC, 7:35.

from the very beginning as a prime obstacle to the success of the scheme.[7] The conclusion is inescapable that the delegation made the decision to enter into the plan on its own hook.

Lacking the authorization of either Knox or Washington, McDougall nevertheless was assured of the vigorous support of a powerful and active segment of the officer corps. For the men serving on the staff of General Gates had decided, at some indeterminable date, to undertake a program in the encampment that would undermine the influence of Washington in the army so that the Commander-in-Chief would not be able to halt a more vigorous protest by the army officers than that embodied in the old memorial.[8] At exactly what point in the development of the plot McDougall made a juncture with the Gates' group it is impossible to say. There are two equally logical possibilities. The

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7. John Armstrong Jr. to General Gates, 29 April 1783, LMCC, 7:155n.

8. By 20 February Hamilton was telling other members in Congress of just such activities on the Hudson, JCC, 25:906-907. Although Hamilton probably did not name many names, it is very likely that he did say that the conspiracy in camp was in part designed to build up Gates as the true spokesman for the army. Washington was aware in some degree of what was on foot. He attributed it to "the old leven," and although he claimed this knowledge to be based on hearsay, there is no reason to doubt that he completely believed that information. Writings of Washington, 26:185-188. It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence to indicate that Gates himself took part in the agitation.

The delegation might have left camp in December with the assurance of support from the Gates' clique; or, the two might have been brought together through the offices of the civilian group in Philadelphia. In either case, the result was the same. As finally put together the grand plan was forwarded by three main elements: the civilians in Philadelphia, the army delegation, also located in the capital city, and the Gates' faction in the Hudson River camp.

Heretofore in these pages numerous references have been made to the "plan" devised for the alliance of the military and the civil. The use of the word is unavoidable but still unfortunate since it necessarily implies a coherent and definite program of action leading up to a climactic event and the attainment of a definite goal. Actually the civilian schemers seem not to have envisaged at that time the accomplishment of anything more than the creation throughout the continent, but especially in the rooms of Congress, of a sense of imminent doom enshrouding the nation and incapable of dissipation unless the nationalists were permitted to have their way in the policies of the central government. Immediately that meant the success of the nationalists' funding program.

At the bottom of the plan lay this basic strategical maneuver: to simplify the original complex situation wherein the army and Congress could see several plausible courses of action open before them. The hope was that in the end

each of those two bodies would be blind to all except two alternatives, one clearly marked 'intolerable' and the other 'acceptable' if not 'desirable'. In the case of the army it meant implanting the conviction that military pressure on Congress would gain the money due, while failure to apply the pressure would see the army permanently defrauded. In the case of Congress it meant that either Congress would accept the nationalists' funding program or else see the army erupt into mutiny.

One great heresy that had to be eradicated from the army's thinking was the lingering faith in the ability and willingness of the individual states to render justice to the army. The vitality of that idea was attested to by the army delegation.[9] The State governments were pictured by various nationalists as fair weather friends whose course of action would always be determined by expediency and convenience. Their promises were worthless because, said Gouverneur Morris, "the best legislature on the Continent will do things which the worst Man among them would in his private Capacity be ashamed of." They will use you during the war and then let you starve "rather than pay a six penny tax."[10] Doubtless this argument was also persistently

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9. G. Morris to Knox, 7 February 1783, LMCC, 7:34n. Johnson, Greene, 2:394-395. As has been seen, Knox himself thought in December that the states were more able than Congress to aid the soldier. See above p. 16-17.

10. LMCC, 7:34n.

strewn among the troops or at least among the officers, by the Gates' faction. However, it is doubtful that Knox saw fit to take an active part in the propaganda work. Though a nationalist, he was no gambling revolutionary, but rather a man who preferred to see his cards before he bet.

The brains behind the scheme were wise enough, however, to recognize the inadequacies of such a negative attack as disparagement of the state governments assuredly was. They realized that a much more effective approach was to inflate the officers' chests with feelings of power and purpose. Make the army realize its potency, its ability to influence the behavior of the civil governments. Convince the army that they did not stand alone, and not only did not stand alone but were actually potential messiahs whose emergence into the political arena the civil creditors were anxiously awaiting. Only let the army take the first step to show the petty politicians that they meant business and the civilian creditors would close ranks with the military to form an offensive wave that could not fail to carry the day. "After you have carried the post," promised Gouverneur Morris, "the public creditors will garrison it for you."[11] How neatly the argument was cut to fit the officer's cast of mind. It gave him a program of action to replace the irksome passivity of waiting for some one

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11. G. Morris to Knox, 7 February 1783, LMCC, 7:34-35n.

else to decide his fate. It bucked him up with a hearty slap on the back that told him he was a man, indeed a man of importance to whom other unfortunates turned for leadership. It appealed to his self-pity, it encouraged the angry emotions that rise so violently in a man who knows he has been wronged. And best of all, the argument was not completely finished. It was as though an enthusiastic tailor had told his customer not to worry about such details as the length of the sleeve because it could always be properly adjusted afterwards. Similarly the soldier worried not a bit about the possible alterations in the American system of government that might result from his violent intrusion into the civil chambers. He was assured that a strong national government would give him justice and so he drank his liquor to vigorous toasts of 'A hoop to the barrel' and 'Cement to the Union.'[12]

The other side of the plot was more simple in conception: to light the fires of fear in Philadelphia by spreading the word that the army was acting ominously, forming decisions to keep their arms, even perhaps to use those weapons against the government itself. That no member of Congress might try to hide from the blaze behind the thought that the trusted Washington could save the situation, Hamilton, and doubtless others, let it be known that America's

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12. Knox to G. Morris, 21 February 1783, Sparks, Gouverneur Morris, 256.

first soldier had lost the trust and friendship of his men.[13]

The operation of the plot in Philadelphia began with the coming of the delegation whose members assiduously cultivated the belief that the army would not disband until satisfied.[14] Few people in Congress had sufficient knowledge and background of the army's temper to permit them to doubt the story. "The terror of a mutinying army is played off with considerable efficacy", wrote Arthur Lee in a mood compounded of bitterness and vexation. For he saw the outlines of the plan, probably even surmised the identity of its backers as they were old enemies, but he lacked the means to fight it.[15]

In the early days of February, Colonel Brooks was detached from the three-man delegation and sent back to the Hudson Highlands. With him he carried the delegation's written report on the progress of its mission.[16] It was not a tale of accomplishments that McDougall had penned to his fellow officers and it surely would not give the recipients any pleasure, as Gouverneur Morris contentedly noted.[17] Nevertheless the report was not completely dis-

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13. JCC, 25:906-907.

14. See above p.35 also Knox Papers (MHS) 11:120.

15. A. Lee to S. Adam, 29 January 1783, LMCC, 7:27-28.

16. McDougall to Ogden to Knox, 8 February 1783, ibid., 35n-36n.

17. G. Morris to Greene, 11 February 1783, Johnson, Greene, 2:394-395. Although inconsequential to the story, it should be noted that in Sparks, G. Morris, this letter is dated 15 February.

couraging. Real hope was held out that with the arrival of the Delaware and Maryland delegates to Congress there would be substantial reason to expect favorable action from the national assembly on the commutation measure. One may easily imagine that the most depressing aspect of the report was the inability of the delegation to suggest a date when Congress would have completed action.

The report was surprisingly frank about the tie-up of the delegation with certain members of Congress whom the report simply referred to as "friends". In almost so many words the delegation admitted that not only had it hitched its wagon to a certain group in Congress but, more important, that the delegation had either decided, or saw no other course than, to follow obediently behind its "friends". The nationalist group bluntly told the delegation that the establishment of the funding system was their prime objective, and that they had no intention of permitting a commutation measure to go through Congress unless it dovetailed with that system. Consequently, when members of the anti-nationalist bloc plugged for referring commutation to the states as a problem properly to be settled between the individual state and its own troops, the nationalists sharply refused.[18] Though Dyer and Collins solemnly maintained that their states, Connecticut and Rhode Island, would never accept any other solution in the commutation

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18. JCC, 25:911-912; 24:145-148; 25:916.

problem than that of referral to the states, the nationalists would not relent.[19] The latter were outspoken to the army delegation on this point; and McDougall reported that sentiment quite boldly, saying that despite their good will, the army's "friends" would "oppose referring us to the States for a settlement and security, till all prospect of obtaining Continental funds was at an end."[20] As will be seen, this admission by the nationalists and McDougall's subservience to the civilians could and would antagonize many in the army if the opinion should gain headway that the quondam "friends" were willing to sacrifice the officers' welfare to the advancement of certain political ends.

Another bid from three Southern delegates, who were antagonistic to the impost but not unfriendly to the claims of the army officers, also had to be eschewed by the army delegation because of its ties with the nationalists. Mercer and Lee of Virginia joined with Rutledge from South Carolina in a proposal that the impost, so fondly beloved by the nationalists, be accepted, provided only that Congress use the revenue for the sole purpose of paying off the nation's debt to the army.[21] The proposal was patently designed to obstruct and embarrass the nationalists. There was not the

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19. JCC, particularly 25:911-912.

20. LMCC, 7:35n

21. JCC, 25:899-901, 902-904.

slightest chance of any real support being formed in Congress. To the New England anti-nationalists it was an impossible bill. Their constituents were principled against the commutation; and to bundle it up with the impost would serve only to insure the defeat of the latter measure whenever it might be sent to those states for their acceptance. Though there was no danger of the proposal being passed, the nationalist orators must have been discomfited as Mercer and his two cronies piously pointed to the dangers of a mutinying army, the darling bogeyman of the nationalists, and cried out that the army must be satisfied in order to save the nation and because the soldiers were the most deserving class among the domestic creditors. The nationalist spokesmen could not outrightly deny these two assertions without going against much that they had already said.[22] Instead Wilson and Madison shifted the grounds of argument to make the major issue one of whether or not the various sources of revenues should be distinctly allocated for specific funds. Hamilton faced up to the central problem in better fashion. He made no bones about attacking the Rutledge-Mercer suggestion on the grounds that the civil creditors would be antagonized and their

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22. Except of course New England nationalists like Gorham whose home state of Massachusetts was definitely denying that the soldiers should be shown exceptional favoritism, i.e., half-pay or commutation. JCC, 25:900.

support for the impost lost. He defended the alliance of the civil creditors with the army, admitting that the impost had no chance of acceptance in the states unless both of those pressure groups gave their whole-hearted support in the state legislatures.

McDougall did not even bother to mention the proposal as a possibility in his report of 7 February.[23] Instead he forestalled any consideration of the idea among the officers. "The zeal of a great number of members of Congress to get Continental funds...induced us to conceal what funds we wished or expected, lest our declaration for one or the other might retard a settlement of our accounts, or a determination on the equivalent for half-pay." The primary object, he argued, was to obtain Congressional assent to commutation "prior to our particularizing what fund will be most agreeable to us; this must be determined by circumstances."[24]

The departure of Brooks with the committee's report was closely followed by the arrival of long-awaited news. Peace was almost a certainty. On 12 February Philadelphians received copies of a December address by King George in

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23. It is true of course that Rutledge, Mercer, and Lee did not make their proposal until 18 February, yet there is no reason to doubt that the possibility of the proposal was known to McDougall earlier.

24. LMCC, 7:35n-36n.

which he told of Britain's intention to lay down the weapons of war. Joy was everywhere in the city except where merchants contemplated over-stocked shelves and warehouses.[25] For members of Congress also the great news was edged with black. For long weeks they had been assured that the army was on the verge of a mutiny. Would this earnest of peace have a soothing effect on the army? Madison and others feared the exact opposite.[26] They expected the worst for they were convinced that the army had decided not to lay down their arms until their demands had been answered. Even more frightening was the prospect that the army would declare this intention to the wide world. Such a move, it was reasoned, could not but bring disgrace on the whole American nation. To save the situation, some members of Congress gave serious thought to the idea of Congress itself making an immediate declaration that the national government would not disband the army until all points at issue had been resolved.[27] A declaration to that effect would have pacified the army and pledged Congress to action. Exactly who originated the idea is not known, but if one might deduce its parentage from the approbation of McDougall

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25. JCC, 25:898.

26. JCC, 25:898. Also Madison to Edmund Randolph, 13 February 1783, LMCC, 7:44.

27. Brutus (McDougall) to Knox, 12 February 1783, Knox Papers (MHS) 11:120.

the answer would probably be the nationalist "friends" of the army. For a few days McDougall had reason to hope the declaration would be forthcoming. By a personal canvass of its members he had found that the pronounced sentiment of Congress was for maintaining the army intact until a settlement had been reached. It was a cheerful item to send Knox who immediately embraced it fervently if a little wistfully as though the idea were too good to live in such a cruel world.[28] And that was indeed the case. The declaration never even reached the floor of Congress. Some person or persons had successfully persuaded the proponents of the declaration to let it die unborn rather than risk a flood of denunciation from the states on the grounds that it was a sinister design to perpetuate an armed force wherewith to awe them.[29]

Except for the slim hope embodied in the proposal, McDougall's letters to Knox immediately subsequent to the arrival of the news about the King's pacific speech ever struck a depressing note.[30] The people in general, he lamented, were only interested in the results that peace would have on their private fortunes. To the army they gave not a thought, he said, but "when some of its members remind

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28. Knox to McDougall, 3 March 1783, ibid., 11:180.

29. "Brutus" (McDougall) to Knox, 27 February 1783, ibid., 11:165.

30. McDougall to Knox, 19 February 1783, ibid., 7:49n.

them of it." The untractable nature of some member of Congress he compared to the difficulty one would have in creating "a Courser's motion in an old Continental Hors." He complained to Knox that he could do no more in Philadelphia. His stay had become "irksome". And always he closed his letter with the express wish to hear what the temper of the army was, commenting that he did not know what to advise until he had that information.

A person who peered over McDougall's shoulder to note that writer's insistent plea for information on the temper of the army might well have been perplexed if he had gone along with Madison on the evening of 20 February to a little get-together at Mr. Fitzsimmon's place. For there he would have seen McDougall's acquaintance, Mr. Hamilton, deferred to by the half-dozen or so members of Congress present as the man who had "the best knowledge of the temper, transactions and views of the army", talking in such a forceful and knowledgeable manner as to arouse in his listeners complete credence in that description.[31] Hamilton blandly maintained that he knew for a certainty not only that the army did not intend to let itself be disbanded without adequate provision being made by Congress, not only that the army would very likely make a declaration to that effect, but also that plans had actually been "agitated if not formed for subsisting themselves after such declaration."

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31. JCC, 25:906-907.

Moreover Hamilton claimed to know that Washington's leadership in the army was fast being undermined "by many leading characters" with the object of substituting a certain other general" as the conductor of their efforts to obtain justice." If our hypothetical and omnipresent observer had a logical mind, he would have concluded from those two scenes that either McDougall was not genuinely desirous of information relative to army attitudes or else that Hamilton did not so much speak from knowledge of what had happened as of what was supposed to have happened or of what he hoped was happening. There are good reasons for suspecting Hamilton's veracity as a view of the contemporary situation on the Hudson will reveal.[32] At the moment it is sufficient to state that Hamilton's evening chat was inaccurate reporting.

The pressure on Congress in the last days of February was applied with hands both resourceful and adept at the dramatic. The stage managers missed few tricks. For example, one day Hamilton and Wilson moved that the debates on financial subjects be thrown open to the public--to show their constituents what their representatives were doing, insisted the proponents; to permit the public creditors a better opportunity of exerting influence, surmised James Madison.[33]

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32. See below, p. 74.

33. JCC, 25:901.

A week later, 26 February, Congress was rocked by a letter from Robert Morris requesting that the injunction of secrecy be removed immediately from his January letter of resignation.[34] The effective date of his resignation "approaches very fast," he explained, and as an honest man he felt it to be his duty to give reasonable warning to the many people who had contracted financial engagements with him and placed personal reliance on him to fulfill those engagements. If Morris had remained satisfied merely to send such a letter to Congress, one might charitably conclude that the author's concern was as he avowed it. But when, shortly after the letter was delivered to Congress and several days before a Congressional committee was due to report on it, the news of the resignation was spread throughout the city and copies of the letters even appeared in the newspapers, it is logical to believe that the propaganda effect was especially valued by Robert Morris.[35] Arthur Lee was doubtless right when he interpreted Morris's resignation as being "a manouvre to force the system of funding upon the states."[36] Possibly Morris's move was also deliberately designed to be the signal for an open campaign by the Gates' faction in the Hudson encampment. Only one day after Morris made his re-

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34. JCC, 24:150-151. Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:266.

35. Pennsylvania Packet, 4 March 1783.

36. A. Lee to S. Adams, 5 March 1783, LMCC, 7:67-68.

quest to Congress for a release from secrecy he wrote a letter explanation to Washington. In his final paragraph, the Superintendent's pen became almost mocking as he expressed his compassion for the army in general and Washington in particular "who must see and feel their distresses without the power of relieving them...."[37] Morris and his friends probably never expected that they could goad Washington into accepting the challenge implicit in the taunt. The most favorable result that they could expect from the dissemination of the news among the officers were exactly the effect that Washington sorrowfully predicted in his reply to Morris, "The Army, I am sure, at the same Time that they entertain the highest Sense of your Exertions, will lament the Step you are obliged to take as a most unfortunate Circumstance to them."[38] The time for active exploration of the army's distress had come. The excitement born of Morris's resignation was at its zenith in the first week of March when Colonel Stewart, agent provacateur and courier for the Philadelphia group, was dispatched to the Highlands to set the wheels moving in the next and

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37. R. Morris to Washington, 27 February 1783. Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:266-267.

38. Washington to the Superintendent of Finance, 8 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:200-201.

final stage of the plot.[39]

With the departure of Colonel Stewart it is time once more to return our attention to the Highlands and the main camp of the American Army. Just one month earlier in February, Colonel Brooks had left Philadelphia to carry back to the officers of the army the official report of their committee's work in the capital.[40] But Brooks had been intrusted with a mission as well as a letter. The plans of the conspiracy called for Brooks to impress on the officers the feasibility of cooperation with the public creditors of the nation. He was to rally the officers, to inspire in them the conviction that they must save themselves if they would be saved. Brooks was not to be a lone worker, he was to inform Gates' group so that their activities might be geared effectively to the over-all scheme.[41]

For one reason or another Brooks failed to carry out the most important parts of his assignment. To Armstrong,

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39. It is impossible to date exactly the departure of Stewart from Philadelphia. However, Washington implied that Stewart arrived at camp on or about 8 March, and since the trip there from Philadelphia usually took about three or four days, it is reasonable to assume that Stewart left Philadelphia, 4 or 5 March. Morris's letters appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet of the fourth of March. Washington to Jos. Jones, 12 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:213-214.

40. See above p. 56.

41. J. Armstrong Jr. to Gates, 29 April 1783, LMCC, 7:155n.

Richmond, Barber, and the other officers in Gates' "family" he breathed not a word of the plan. That we know. But otherwise the exact details of what Brooks did and did not do are lost to the historian. Indeed the events of the whole next month are obscure. However it is not difficult to piece together a logical story capable of proof at several points along the way. Probably Brooks divulged the plan to Knox at the same time that he submitted the committee's report to him. For the general was the nominal head of the officer movement, and, in all liklihood, the Philadelphia group still believed him willing to forward the plan they had devised. Was not Hamilton at this very time advising Washington to work with Knox?[42] Perhaps Washington acted on Hamilton's advice or perhaps on his own initiative he had discussed officers' problems and strategy with Knox. No matter the source of the impetus, Knox and Washington came to substantial agreement on their attitude toward the developing situation.[43] It was only natural, therefore, that Washington should be told of the confidential

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42. See above p. 50n.

43. The close agreement between Knox and Washington in both ideas and form of expression during this period is pointed out by Bancroft, Formation of the Constitution, 1:89n.

information brought by Brooks. It does not seem too much to assume that it was at Washington's wish that Brooks' news from Philadelphia never passed beyond the bearer, Knox, and Washington.

Two questions of general interest should be posed at this point and some attempt made to answer them. The first concerns Washington's unwillingness to align himself with the movement on foot. The second concerns Knox's adhesion to the lonely cause of Washington. That Washington would have been welcomed by all the conspirators, with the possible exception of the most die-hard of Gates' "family", can not be doubted. His refusal to follow the enticing path of opportunism can only be explained in terms of a heart encompassing the general welfare of the American people and of a mind burning through the rosy dreams of fanatics. How easy it would have been for a less perceptive man enthroned at the head of his country's army to have indulged himself in the luxury of thinking that a few bold flashes of the unsheathed sword would magically set

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44. LMCC, 7:155n. Armstrong to Gates, 29 April 1783, Exactly when Washington was informed by either Brooks or Knox there is no way of knowing. However, it might well have been as early as Brooks arrival in camp, for only a few days after that event Washington wrote a letter to Steuben. In this letter he indicated an angry interest in Colonel Stewart's continued absence from camp on sick leave for, said Washington, he had repeatedly heard that Stewart was completely recovered. Washington's interest in the healthy Mr. Stewart's activities in Philadelphia may well have arisen from Brooks' information on the machinations in Philadelphia. Washington to Steuben, 18 February 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:143.

affairs to right. Washington recognized what so many of his contemporaries and associates would not face steadily, the simple, even obvious, fact that the states of America could not be directly coerced either in the minor matter of paying the army or in the major matter of accepting a stronger central government. There lay the great virtue or intelligence of Washington. That of Knox was neither so resplendent or lofty, but rather partook of a common-sense practicality. Knox may have been convinced by Washington that the army could never succeed in forcing its will on the nation. But even if Knox could not have appreciated the force of that argument, he knew that to talk vaguely of the army uniting with the public creditors was fatuous unless Washington would consecrate the move. Any other military man could only succeed in isolating the army completely from the affections of the civil populace. To Gouverneur Morris, who spoke so inspirationally of the exalted role awaiting the army, Knox offered the simple words of truth.[45] We know, said Knox, that the states are selfish. The army's "ardent desires have been to be one continental body looking up to one sovereign." The army would gladly help in any move that "would tend to produce union, and a permanent general constitution...but they (the army) are yet to be taught how their influence is to effect this matter. They

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45. Knox to G. Morris, 21 February 1783, Sparks, G. Morris, 1:256.

may assist, but they must be directed in the mode by proper authority." Better, concluded Knox, to attack directly the core of the whole problem, reform of the present ineffective constitution. "Why," he asked, "do not you great men call the people together and tell them of the defects of the constitution?" Whether Knox's suggestion of a constitutional convention was made in all seriousness or not, it is obvious that he had no faith in any plan that relied on the military taking the initiative. In Washington's mind the modes of influence that the army could successfully use were clear-cut, very limited, and almost wholly passive. Let Congress point to the needs and demands of the army; let Congress demonstrate to the states the justice due the army and the inability of Congress to help the soldier unless the states give their aid. "In any other point of view it would...be impolitic to introduce the Army on the Tapis; lest it should excite jealousy, and bring on its concomitants," Washington warned.[46] For Washington the only safe use of the army was as a propaganda poster in an appeal to the states for support of Congressional legislation.

How well Washington had gauged the temper of the American people and with it the narrow limits within which the army could wield its influence was fully demonstrated by an incident that took place in South Carolina only a few

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46. Washington to Hamilton, 4 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:185-188.

days after Washington had expressed his views to Hamilton. All winter long the Southern army under the command of General Greene had been growing increasingly restless and ugly. Added to the general causes of unrest which we have seen at work in the Northern army was a special venom aroused in Greene's men because they believed that they were being held at their disagreeable post by the selfish desires of the Southern delegates in Congress.[47] Greene himself was on Gouverneur Morris's mailing list so that he was well acquainted with the arguments about Congressional weakness, the recalcitrancy of the states, the need for a combination of army and public creditors, and the desirability of the nationalists' funding program.[48] One of the most competent commanders developed in the Revolution, Greene was not afraid to throw his weight about in the state whose deliverer he truly was. Before him lay the opportunity to inform the civil government of the needs and hopes of the army. Moreover the newly elected South Carolina government was on the verge of expressing its dominant anti-nationalist sentiments by reconsidering the state's acceptance in 1782 of the old 5% impost. The result was a letter of 8 March addressed to the governor of South Carolina in which Greene

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47. Johnson, Greene, 2:387.

48. G. Morris to Greene, 11 February 1783, ibid., 394-395.

rehearsed the penniless condition of the national treasury and the poverty of soldier and officer.[49] The eyes of the army, he continued, were squarely turned toward the states from whence had to come action to succour the national government. No longer, he warned, would the army be put off with sympathetic but valueless promises, "Nothing short of permanent and certain revenue, will keep them subject to authority." Nestled in this argument was the ominous threat that the army would disband itself and leave South Carolina unprotected from possible retaliation by British forces." This country is much better calculated for revenue than for war." he concluded. To appreciate the full force of the threat, one must remember that a continuation of the war was still a definite possibility when Greene wrote the letter. The reaction of the legistlature was as instantaneous as it was fierce. The cries and declamations agreed in casting Green as another Cromwell come down to dictate his wishes. The General, of course, was greatly taken aback and immediately dispatched another letter to the governor denying any intention to dictate to the assembly. But like many another proud and impolitic man in a similar situation, Greene could not restrain himself in the letter, as his biographer says, from "a taste of stubborn vindication, and a cast of satire." Greene had succeeded only in deepening

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49. G. Morris to Greene, 11 February 1783, Johnson, Greene, 387-389. The letter is not reprinted in full but the summary seems a full one.

particularist sentiment in South Carolina and in speeding the repeal of the old federal impost act.

With the go-ahead signal from Philadelphia intercepted, the general situation on the Hudson changed but little during February. Brooks kept partial faith with his old hirers as he predicted in dreary accents the probable failure of the Philadelphia mission.[50] And yet there were signs that the crescent promise of peace was acting as a soporific on the discontents in camp.[51] To be sure nationalist sentiment was still strong and doubtless many officers were discouraged enough by the committee's unappetizing report to feel that "the mountain has brought forth a mouse."[52] But the army in general was resigned to accepting its fate. When we do find an officer encamped in Northern Jersey mentioning the possibility of concerted action by the army, he is, interestingly enough, not reporting an idea current in camp, but one emanating from civilian sources: "there are some politicians who openly suggest that the Army will not quietly lay down their arms."[53] The reader can now

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50. S. Webb to Major J. A. Wright, 28 February 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:3-4.

51. Shaw to Rev. Eliot, 23 February 1783, Quincy, Shaw, 100-101.

52. Ibid.

53. "Letters to William Henry" in Pa. Magazine of History and Biography, 22:112-113. Moses Hazen to W. Henry, 23 February 1783. Hazen was at Pompton, New Jersey at this time.

judge for himself the veracity of Hamilton and Co. who were in those very same days assiduously cramming the ears of their fellow Congressmen with tales of an army prepared to act unitedly to enforce their demands.[54]

At best, General Knox could only regard those quiet days as a temporary respite. He did not deceive himself with the fantasy that the plot to organized the military was finally defeated. The officers were still ripe for trouble whenever the organizing touch and call for action should cross the scene.. Turmoil might be permanently avoided, he believed, if Congress would only take a few definite steps that would have at least the semblance of friendly support for the army. If treated with consideration "the army will return to their respective homes the lambs and bees of the community," but if nothing is done, he prophesied to the Secretary for War, "they will be so deeply stung by the injustice and ingratitude of their country as to become its tigers and wolves."[55] The crucial point was Congress, that body about which Gouverneur Morris wrote to Knox, "It is not in them to conceive great nor to pursue just ideas...There is a collosity of soul about them which must be seen to be conceived of."[56] But Knox understood

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54. See above, p. 63.

55. Knox to B. Lincoln, 3 March 1783, Drake, Knox, 79-80.

56. G. Morris to Knox, 28 February 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 11:168.

much. He knew there was a degree of truth in the scurrility of such descriptions of Congress, but he also believed that Congress was no unscalable height if the officer delegation would only surrender the livery of the nationalists and seek a compromise with the Congress as a whole. "It will take much time to change or amend the present form (of government): must our accounts, therefore, remain unsettled until this shall have been considered and decided upon? I think not." Therefore, he urged McDougall to ask Congress only to fix the rate of commutation and to appoint a person to settle the accounts of the army. With that accomplished, let Congress refer the military to the individual states for the actual payment of the money due, he concluded.[57] Besides urging these instructions on McDougall, there was little or nothing that Knox could do. He must await the verdict of events over which he could exert no controlling hand.

Nor was there much that Washington could do to order the train of history so long as there was no visible opponent with whom to grapple. The Gates' faction he knew to be working against him, but there was nothing to be done about it while it carried on "under a mask of the most perfect dissimulation, and apparent cordiallity."[58] It was a

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57. Knox to McDougall, 21 February 1783, Drake, Knox, 78-79.

58. Washington to Hamilton, 4 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:185-188.

difficult position for Washington: to know that troubles were stirring and yet be unable to act. Hamilton had gratuitously advised Washington that the wisest policy for the Commander to pursue would be to aim at retaining the confidence of both the army and the civilian population.[59] To accomplish that end Hamilton suggested that Washington should not block further plans for a protest by the military but rather make sure that "trusted and prudent persons" were in control. Washington then would be able "in case of extremity to guide the torrent and to bring order, perhaps even good out of confusion." There was much wisdom in Hamilton's recommendation, and it makes apparent Hamilton's distrust of an army led by men whose political orientation was either vague or unknown. Hamilton and Washington saw eye to eye on most of the political problems of the day, the decentralized quality of the confederation, the desirability of general funds, a standing army, and the like. Hence Hamilton followed a devious policy probably unsuspected by some of his more violent co-workers such as Gouverneur Morris and the Gates faction. For while he strove anxiously to loose the most violent winds upon the political sea, he also prayed that the proven hand of Washington would continue to steer the ship. It would be a mistake to see in Hamilton an irresponsible person indifferent to the

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59. Hamilton to Washington, 7 February 1783, LMCC, 7:33-35.

possibilities of internal revolution. Some of his friends may have viewed chaos with equanimity but not Hamilton. He was during this period taking only a calculated risk with limited ends in view. Washington very possibly half-guessed, if he did not understand, the course that Hamilton was pursuing. As for Hamilton's advice that Washington control but not block developments in the army, Washington had been doing that very thing for months and would continue to do the same. Indeed there was no other feasible policy open to Washington. Like Knox, all his hopes for a satisfactory solution to the army problems rested on voluntary Congressional action. In the meantime Washington viewed the army situation with an unwarranted optimism. Almost on the eve of Stewart's trouble making advent, Washington was outwardly confident that he could control the army "notwithstanding the prevailing sentiment in the army is, that the prospect of compensation for past Services will terminate with the War."[60]

Among the first duties of Colonel Stewart upon his arrival in camp on or about 8 March was to discover whether or not Washington would place himself at the head of the new military protest.[61] This attempt to win over Washington

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60. Writings of Washington, 26:187.

61. Rufus King Papers (NYHS) Box 3, no. 62. These notes made by King of a conversation with William Duer in October 1788.

was probably made at the instance of Hamilton. Just what Stewart may have told Washington of the plot on foot is not known. Certainly Stewart was a poor choice to enter into any negotiations with the Commander-in-Chief for he was already persona non grata because of his long over-stay of sick leave.[62] Rebuffed by Washington, the emissary then secured the consent of Gates to head the new movement.[63] Although ostensibly Gates was the second choice, he had probably been looked upon by his "family" for some time as the man for the job. One can only wonder what the reaction of the Gates' group would have been if Washington had warmed to the proposals of Stewart. It may have been that Gates and his supporters had actually no prior knowledge of the bid that Stewart would bring with him in March.

The plan called for immediate action. A preliminary period of two or three days was put to good advantage by Stewart and the other ringleaders in circulating the "news" that the public creditors were only waiting for the army to declare their intention not to disband before announcing their own willingness to aid the soldiers "and even join them in the field," reported an indignant Washington.[64]

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62. Writings of Washington, 26:143.

63. Rufus King Papers, (NYHS), Box 3, no. 62.

64. Washington to Jos. Jones, 12 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:213-216.

And more, the army was assured that some members of Congress were anxious to see the declaration made for its expected tonic effect on the delinquent states. The next move executed by the conspirators was to capitalize quickly on the obvious willingness of the officers to believe the wondrous news. That meant a formal written call to action. To young Major John Armstrong Jr., was given the pen with which to indite the stirring summons. Working in Gates' own quarters, assisted by another aide of Gates, Captain Richmond, and by Gates' assistant adjutant, Major Barber, Armstrong had the letter ready for distribution by the tenth of March. At least that was the day that copies of the letters were rapidly distributed throughout the officer's quarters.[65]

Before evening came on the tenth, the officers corps was excitedly discussing the anonymous letter as well as an accompanying summons to all general and field officers requesting them and a commissioned officer from every company to attend a meeting on the twelfth for the stated purpose of discussing the committee report brought by Brooks from Philadelphia "and what measures (if any) should be adopted to obtain that redress of grievances which they (the

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65. Extract of a letter from Gates to Armstrong, 22 June 1783, Bancroft, Formation of the Constitution, 1:318.

officers) seem to have solicited in vain."[66] Armstrong's masterpiece was perhaps a bit too lengthy, and judged by twentieth-century literary standards it was also extremely rococco. But there is no denying the complete mastery of emotional phraseology. From first to last the letter was pitched to the fiercest temper. The officers' patriotism was extolled, his poverty mourned, and his past faith in country praised. But the time for "manly action" had come. The memorial still pending before Congress was derided as "entreating" and begging for justice. And what had it gained the army? The committee's report spoke for itself. Therefore, "awake; attend to your situation and redress yourselves. If the present moment be lost, every future effort is in vain; and your threats then, will be as empty as your entreaties now." No longer shall we rest content to base our appeals on justice, now it must be carried "to the fears of government." The time is past for trifling, "suspect the man who would advise to more moderation and longer forebearance"--an obvious attempt to arm the officers against the probable appeal of Washington. The letter closed with a definite program of action: let the officers draw up a spirited and "last remonstrance", not a memorial

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66. The two anonymous letters and the anonymous call for a meeting are to be found in JCC, 24:294-311 along with Washington's General Order of 12 March, his address to the meeting, and a report of the subsequent proceedings of the officers at the meeting.

but a remonstrance, and in this remonstrance let it be known that the officers will no longer receive "the slightest mark of indignity from Congress...(for that)must operate like the grave." The army, he concludes, have the whip hand. If peace comes, they can refuse to lay down their arms; if war resumes, "courting the auspices, and inviting the direction of your illustrious leader (i. e. Washington)" they can retire to "some unsettled country" and mock the fears of their unprotected and ungrateful country.

The great weakness of the new movement was, of course, the refusal of Washington to be a sponsor. Without him, success depended on the utmost speed of the whole proceeding so that Washington would be unable to gain the initiative. But swiftly as they had moved, the conspirators nevertheless lost the initiative. Washington had for some time been expecting the discontent to come to a head and probably the visit of Stewart put him on guard. Yet when the storm broke, it shocked and angered him. But with the sure instinct of an old tactician facing an enemy of overwhelming numbers, Washington did not try to stop the onrush with a direct attack. Instead, on the morning of the eleventh of March, one day after the anonymous letters appeared and the very day that the unofficial meeting of the officers was to be held, Washington issued a general order.[67]

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67. Writings of Washington, 26:208.

In a few unhurried sentences he announced his firm belief that none of his officers would pay attention "to such an irregular invitation." At the same time the order requested the general and field officers along with officers representative of the companies to meet four days later on Saturday in order to hear their committee's report and to decide on further measures "to attain the just and important object in view."

The general order was successful. The meeting scheduled for the eleventh was never held. Immediately the conspirators felt themselves forced on the defensive. The next day, the twelfth, they brought out another anonymous letter anxiously assuring the great mass of officers that Washington was not opposed to the steps announced in the first anonymous letter. If the commander disapproved, they queried, would he not have called off the meeting completely? By taking cognizance of it and merely postponing it, he had given to the meeting on the fifteenth "an official aspect." However, the second anonymous letter was a poor attempt to disguise a definite defeat. Where two short days earlier the managers had been sweeping along on a great wave of officer approval, they were now abruptly reduced to exercising petty fears. It was obvious that Washington alone might weigh more in the balance than all the grievances afflicting the officers.

Washington had no illusions, however, that final

victory was assured. The storm, he told Hamilton, is "diverted for a moment (but) is not yet blown over, nor is it in my power to point to the issue."[68] There were few things of a positive nature that the Commander could do before the meeting. He had the Congressional resolutions of the twenty-fifth of January anent the army published in the general orders.[69] Washington doubtless felt that those resolutions spoke well for the intention of Congress to do justice to the army. And it was on Congress that Washington had long built his hopes. He would not falter in that faith no matter how poorly it was sometimes vindicated by the activities of Congress.[70] As a nationalist who looked with a jaundiced eye on the jealousies of the individual states he would do nothing to weaken the power or prestige of the central government, that body whose powers he felt should be vastly augmented. Any idea that the desired buttressing might be provided by an unauthorized employment of the military he would not countenance. On his desk lay a recently received letter from a venerable fellow Virginian, Joseph Jones, then serving his state as delegate in Congress.[71]

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68. Washington to Hamilton, 12 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:216-218.

69. Ibid., 221-222.

70. Washington to President of Congress, 12 March 1783, ibid., 211-212.

71. Letters of Joseph Jones of Virginia, 1777-1787. (Washington, 1889) 97-103.

With an anxious intensity born of fears aroused by the talk in Philadelphia of a revolting army, Jones assured Washington that Congress was honestly trying to cope with the army pay problem. Delays he blamed on the states. Therefore, Jones urged Washington at all costs not to let the army act intemperately. Once they have openly set themselves against the civil administration, said he, "the Rubicon is passed." From that moment the military would be isolated from the civil community, "and I shall be among the number of those who entertain fears of the army." Jones was one of the first persons to whom Washington wrote immediately after the first anonymous letter had appeared.[72] Washington expressed agreement with Jones' views even though that position was unpopular at camp. He related bitterly the circumstances of the anonymous addresses and scarcely tried to hid behind the impersonal phrase, "it is generally believed", his conviction that the trouble had been cooked up in Philadelphia by some people "playing a double game". As a brief aside, it might be mentioned that that same day Washington wrote a letter to Hamilton almost word for word the same as that to Jones with the interesting exception that to Hamilton he said nothing of some people "playing a double game." Instead, he merely told Hamilton that about the happenings in Philadelphia he was withholding his opinion until he had

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72. Washington to J. Jones, 12 March 1783. Writings of Washington, 26:213-216.

better grounds for passing judgment.[73]

As Washington looked about for men to help him rescue "the foot...wavering on the precipice of despair" from going over into the "abyss of misery while the passions were inflamed," he found few to be counted.[74] Knox would support him but his influence on the mass of officers could only be a pail of water splashed on a large fire. It was better strategy for Knox, and whatever other few friends Washington's policy might have, to hold silent until Washington himself had given a real set-back to the men behind the Addresses. Then would come the opportune moment for Knox to step forward as the moderate, the compromiser. Besides Knox, Washington could expect the support of General Rufus Putnam, Colonel Brooks, and an indeterminate but small number of other officers , all of whom probably reasoned much as Putnam.[75] General Putnam was convinced that to win their demands from Congress at the point of a bayonet would irretrievably separate the civil and the military. Even worse, he pointed out, that would be merely the first action. In its wake would be tugged along an endless series of unpalatable duties for the officers.

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73. Washington to Hamilton, 12 March 1783, ibid., 216-218.

74. Ibid., 214. Quincy, Shaw, 104.

75. Hatch, Administration, 205-208. This is a paper written by Putnam as an answer to the anonymous addresses. As far as can be known it was never distributed or otherwise used.

First they would have to remain organized and under arms for an indefinite period of time or else, once freed, the civil administration would in its anger turn upon the extorters. That meant, said Putnam, that the officers would have to depend on a considerable army to perpetuate the de facto situation. Would the common soldier long consent to lend his services to the officers? Putnam dismissed the idea as inconceivable. And equally fantastic would be all solutions to the problem of subsisting an independent army. No, said Putnam, the final act of such a drama would find the officers skulking off to dens and caves. Why should the officers even contemplate such a desperate venture, he asked? Congress had already acted on most of their demands to the full extent of its ability; and the matter of commutation it had handed over to a special committee. Congress was faithfully doing its best. "Our business then," he concluded, "lies within a very narrow compass--viz. a warm and affectionate address to our Illustrious Chief--pointing out the disadvantages that arise to the Army if they should be disbanded before their accounts are settled, or in case the War continues, that justice and policy require there should not be a moments delay--beseeching his Excellency that he would use his influence to have the business set about immediately." This last sentence states the program of the small moderate group. They knew that a policy of complete inactivity would never be accepted by the officer corps. Some protest had to be

permitted or the boiler would explode. What was essential was that the new protest should go through authorized channels, that is, the Commander-in-Chief. Already matters had progressed so far that the declaration to Congress not to disband was favored by nearly everyone. If expressed to Congress as a wish, and passing through the conservative voice of Washington, it would be strained of all radicalism and force.[76]

The officers assembled on Saturday as requested. General Gates took the chair as senior officer, and the meeting was under way. Washington rose and began his lengthy but effective speech. It was later said by one officer, perhaps with some exaggeration, that on other occasions he had been "supported by the exertions of an army and the countenance of his friends; but in this he stood single and alone. There was no saying where the passions of an army, which were not a little influenced might lead; but it was generally allowed that longer forbearance was dangerous, and moderation had ceased to be a virtue. Under these circumstances he appeared, not at the head of his troops, but as it were in opposition to them; and for a dreadful moment the interests of the army and its general seemed to be in competition! He spoke,--every doubt was dispelled, and the tide of patriotism rolled again in its

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76. On 25 February Steuben wrote from the Philadelphia area to Knox suggesting this same procedure. Knox Papers (MHS) 11:160.

wonted course."[77] The speech Washington delivered was pure Washington--nothing added to cater to whims or curry approbation.[78] He took up as a personal challenge the claim in the first anonymous address that men of moderation were no longer to be heeded. He came before the meeting, he said, as an untiring worker for the army's cause. His services would always be available to the army as long as he was asked to do things which could be done "consistently with the great duty I owe my Country." Even if he were not strongly principled against the modes of action called for in the first anonymous address, he would not consider them anyway, he said, because they were impossible of physical execution. When he came to the identity of the author of the addresses, Washington was not above the conscious smear, "some Emissary, perhaps, from New York, plotting the ruin of both, by sowing the seeds of discord and separation between the Civil and Military powers of the Continent?" Most of his listeners believed the author was Gouverneur Morris, and knew that the plot originated in Philadelphia.[79] The closing paragraphs of the speech found Washington firmly defending

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77. Shaw to Rev. Eliot, April 1783, Quincy, Shaw, 104.

78. Writings of Washington, 26:222-227.

79. So testified Colonel David Cobb many years later. Octavius Pickering, The Life of Timothy Pickering (4 vols., Boston, 1867-1873) 1:433.

Congress, saying that "in a body like Congress, with a variety of different interests, slowness can not be helped." To evidence the good intentions and promise of Congress he read from Joseph Jones' letter. And for one reason or another the letter it has been said, made a strong impression on the assembled officers.[80] Washington had given a masterful performance. The so-called Newburgh Affair had reached the climax. A delicate balance had been achieved and it appeared as though the mass of officers might at that moment have been tipped in either direction.[81] But Knox and Putnam sustained the momentum of Washington's attack after the Commander had withdrawn to give the officers the opportunity to make their choice. The two New Englanders pushed through a unanimous resolve thanking Washington for his address. Then after the Philadelphia committee's report and the Congressional resolutions of 25 January had been read, Putnam, seconded by General Hand, moved for the appointment of a committee to draw up resolutions expressive of the officer's attitudes. The proponents of the anonymous addresses were either bewildered or had given up hope of victory for to the committee of three were chosen Knox, Brooks, and a company officer, Captain Howard. In a short time, this committee reported back with four resolves. The

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80. General E. Hand to General Irvine, 19 April 1783, Bancroft, Formation of the Constitution, 1:307.

81. Rufus King Papers (NYHS) Box 3, no. 62.

first asserted the officers' intention not to sully their reputation, no matter how trying circumstances might be. The second resolve expressed the officers' faith in the justice of Congress and the nation, being "fully convinced that the representatives of America will not disband or disperse the army until their accounts are liquidated, the balances accurately ascertained, and adequate funds established for payment, and, in this arrangement, the officers expect that the half-pay, or a commutation of it, should be efficaciously comprehended." The third resolve requested Washington to write of the army's wishes to Congress, and roundly condemned the anonymous addresses and their author. The fourth thanked the Philadelphia committee and requested McDougall to stay on until the objects of the missions were gained.[82] The resolutions were adopted unanimously and the meeting was over. Washington had won the day. "Never through all the war, did his Excellency achieve a greater victory than on this occasion--a victory over jealousy, just discontent, and great opportunities."[83]

The reactions of the officers to the denouement of their show were mixed. The great majority immediately began to behave and talk as though they had never approved of

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82. JCC, 24:310-311.

83. Benson J. Lossing, The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler (2 vols., New York, 1873), 2:427n.

the addresses. Privately, author Armstrong burned with bitterness. Of Washington's claim to be ever the zealous spokesman for the army, Armstrong somewhat later sneered, "of all his illustrious foibles, I think the affectation of Zeal in a cause he strove so anxiously to damn, is the most ridiculous; and like the lies of Falstaff, or Falstaff himself, it is gross and palpable."[84] A few like Colonedl Pickering were indignant at the way the officers had turned their coats, damning "with infamy two publications, which during the four preceding days, most of them had read with admiration, and talked of with rapture."[85] On the other hand he believed the main object had been attained: Congress was to be informed that the army did not wish to disband until their accounts were settled, and funds established to pay them. He trusted that Congress and the states would heed this warning.[86] Knox was, of course, delighted by the turn of events. His shrewd eye saw the possibilities of using the whole proceedings as effective propaganda throughout the nation. "The people," he felt, "should be grateful to the army for its behavior in this instance." The very day after the meeting he was importuning the Secretary of

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84. Armstrong to Gates, 30 May 1783, LMCC, 7:175n.

85. Pickering to Hodgdon, 16 March 1783, Pickering, 1:439-440.

86. Pickering to Mrs. Pickering, 16 March 1783, ibid., 442.

War to publish the proceedings as soon as possible.[87] It was not long before some officers were convinced that the renunciation scene was worth all the trouble caused by the anonymous addresses for without its materialization the patriotism and honor of the army would have remained hidden under a bushel.[88]

When the communication from Washington announcing his successful opposition to the Newburgh Addresses was read in Congress on 22 March, a general sigh of blessed relief was breathed. For the previous week a heavy cloud of despondency had settled over Philadelphia, except, one may suppose, in the dwellings of those nationalists privy to the scheme. Among other nationalists the gloom had been, if anything, thicker than in the small anti-nationalist camp.[89] That fact is not to be wondered at since the nationalists were by doctrine sensitive to any slight offered Congress. As sturdy a nationalist as the President of Congress, Elias Bondinot, strenuously defended the present Congress against the charges of the army which were

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87. Knox to Lincoln, 16 March 1783, Drake, Knox, 80. Jed. Huntington to A. Huntington, 18 March 1783, Huntington Papers (CHS) 20:460.

88. Shaw to Rev. Eliot, 3 May 1783, Quincy, Shaw, 105-107.

89. See, for example, Md. delegates to Governor Paca, Madison to Edm. Randolph, 18 March 1783, LMCC, 7:88-89, 89-90.

relayed to him by Washington immediately after the appearance of the first anonymous address. Like Jones he warned Washington that any extra-legal acts by the army would hinder rather than speed Congressional action.[90]

The twenty-second of March also brought good news to the army officers for on that day the long struggle for the commutation of the half-pay was successfully consummated. The winds had begun to blow more favorably for the proponents of the measure in the last days of February. To be sure there was still a minority which hitherto had been capable of blocking passage, but events were rapidly approaching a climax. The states of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New Jersey constituted the bulwark of the opposition, and they looked and were unbudgeable. All the other delegations present were favorable but one. The crucial state was Connecticut; its delegation of two, Oliver Wolcott and Eliphalet Dyer, were split over the commutation. Actually neither of them liked the idea, both would much have preferred to see the problem referred to the states. But the nationalists had clubbed that solution decisively each time it was raised. Wolcott, therefore, had decided to go along with the majority even though his state was bitterly opposed. Dyer would not follow. But his inner conflicts became clearly visible

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90. Bondinot to Washington, 17 March 1783, ibid., 7:81-85.

on 28 February when the question was raised as to whether or not the commutation measure should be considered a new appropriation or a modification of a previous act of Congress, the half-pay measure. If Congress judged it to be a wholly new appropriation nine votes were necessary, otherwise only seven were required for passage according to the rules of Congress. Since exactly seven states were on record in favor of the commutation report, Congress by accepting the latter interpretation could pave the way for immediate acceptance of the commutation. Evidently Dyer saw in this an opportunity to see the troublesome commutation passed while he could retain the luxury of a negative vote. Unfortunately for his hopes, only he and one other delegate voted to consider seven states sufficient.[91] That same day, Dyer and Wolcott tried to dress up the anti-nationalist plan of referral to the states by adding a clause specifying that five years full pay should be the basis of a commutation settlement in the states. Neither the supporters or opponents of the basic commutation measure would have any truck with that compromise motion. The Connecticut delegates stood alone.[92]

Those were trying days for a few delegates who were friendly to the anti-nationalist outlook but were growing

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91. JCC, 24:155-156.

92. Ibid., 25:918.

increasingly apprehensive over the continuance of the Congressional stalemate. Morris' resignation, added to the omnipresent threat of a "mutinying" army, at last caused Mercer of Virginia and Samuel Holten of Massachusetts to do an about-face on general funds.[93] Less than two weeks earlier, Mercer had been vowing his willingness to crawl to Richmond on his bare knees to help fight against any move in his native state to re-enact a federal impost.[94]

The same pressures that spun Mercer and Holten around were wearing down Dyer's resistance to the commutation. When the Delaware delegates arrived in the first days of March to boost the pro-commutation total to eight states, Dyer's vote became absolutely decisive. His vote, cast affirmatively, would bring McDougall's job to an end. By the tenth of the month, McDougall thought Dyer had given in, only to see him demur at the last moment even though he, Dyer, had been the one to move for reconsideration of the commutation on that day.[95] McDougall, naturally enough, was embittered at what he deemed a breach of faith, for Dyer had earlier indicated, if not promised, that he would switch his position when the Delaware delegates arrived. There

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93. JCC, 25:916-917. Madison to Edm. Randolph, 4 March 1783, LMCC, 7:65.

94. Madison to Edm. Randolph, 18 February 1783, LMCC, 7:49-50.

95. JCC, 24:178-179.

was good reason for McDougall to be vexed. Twelve states were then fully represented in Congress, a vary rare occurenc. At any moment, sickness or one of a multitude of other causes, might decrease the representation and thereby postpone a settlement indefinitely. McDougall swore he would return to the army if his next and last attempt to convert Dyer failed.[96] But McDougall's pessimism was shared by few in Congress and rightly so.[97] Dyer's acquiescence, said Madison, "seemed to be extorted from him by the critical state of our affairs, himself personally and his state being opposed."[98] As a sort of last request before facing the firing squad of home opinion, Dyer pleaded for a preamble to the Congressional resolution on the commutation. It was his futile hope that an explanatory justification would reconcile Connecticut to the measure.[99] The preamble assumed that the states wanted to do right by the officers and had in the past opposed the half-pay only because it was a pension. Therefore, said the preamble, a commutation of the half-pay was substituted so as to remove that cardinal objection.[100] It was little enough that Dyer asked, and though

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96. McDougall to Knox, 15 March 1783, LMCC, 7:72r-73n.

97. B. Hawkins to A. Nash, E. McComb to C. Rodney, W. Floyd to G. Clinton, 11,12, 12 March 1783, ibid, 7:70, 72-73, 73-74.

98. JCC, 25:936-937.

99. Ibid., 25:938.

100. Ibid., 24:207.

some members argued against its inclusion, the preamble was retained. As finally enacted, the officers then in service and continuing therein until the end of the war were entitled to five years full pay in money or in securities at six per cent, "as Congress shall find most convenient." The securities were to be of the same type as others regularly given to the nation's creditors. Within a few months, the lines of each state were to signify their acceptance or refusal of a commutation. A line which refused would retain its claim to half-pay. As soon as a line agreed, the Superintendent of Finance was to take steps to settle the officers' accounts completely and issue the certificates.[101]

The commutation was passed on 22 March with the necessary nine votes. New Hampshire, New Jersey and the lone Rhode Island delegate present voted 'no'. The army delegation had at last seen all its original demands agreed to by Congress.[102] One great question still remained: Could and would Congress give substance to its promises?

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101. JCC, 24:207-210.

102. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE FIASCO OF DISBANDMENT

Washington had pledged his word to do everything in his power to aid the army as long as the methods might be consonant with his duty to country. It was not possible for him to leave his post in order personally to confront Congress with the justness of the army's claims but his letters to members of Congress were vigorous statements designed to serve that purpose. When he forwarded the resolutions encompassing the wishes of the officers, he accompanied them with pleas for mercy and justice whose emotional quantities were scantily hid by the formal conventions of eighteenth-century composition. If the army's moderate hopes were answered, he said, "then shall I have realized a tale which will imbitter every moment of my future life."[1] Above all else the accounts of the army had to be liquidated. That was the most important task, he said. The army was well aware that large payments were not immediately possible, the General assured Congress, and so they had no intention to press on bull-headedly demanding everything at once. But to disband them before the accounts had been settled and the balances ascertained "would be/to set open the doors of the Goals, and then to shut them upon Seven Years faithful and painful Services."[2] Spare them that final indignity,

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1. Washington to the President of Congress, 18 March 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:229-232.

2. Washington to Jos. Jones, 18 March 1783, ibid, 232-234.

pleaded the commander. Even at best the officers would suffer much, for "necessity will compel them to part with their certificates for whatever they will fetch...and how much this will place them in the hands of unfeeling, avaricious speculators a recurrence to past experience will sufficiently prove."

To most of his correspondents Washington was satisfied to write in terms of extreme simplicity: the army was a unity, Congress another, and the people of the United States still another. Each was an entity speaking with its own peculiar voice; each had certain obligations due the others. As always, however, the realities of the situation were much deeper and more numerous than the usual pronouncements of a public official admit. If no guide post other than the Newburgh Affair had existed, Washington would still have understood much of the complexities and subterranean swirlings. In addition, Washington had been informed by his one-time aide, Alexander Hamilton. Except that he would admit to no such thing as an extra-legal plot, the latter did not try to hide from Washington his own endeavors to yoke the public creditors and the army to the end that the nationalist funding program might be established.[3] That was what he had been trying to do, Hamilton asserted, and he had no regrets about making the attempt: the idea had not only been logical but had promised to be

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3. Hamilton to Washington, 17 March 1783, LMCC, 7:85-87.

the only one capable of stemming the drift toward particularism. In Hamilton's eyes no evil had been done, nor even envisaged, and he blandly expected a confirmed nationalist like Washington to give his approbation. Where the powers of logic led him, Hamilton seldom if ever was afraid to follow. He saw his goals with amazing clarity and went ahead to achieve them with an audacity found among few of his contemporaries. Being a recent immigrant he was not one to compromise for he could not appreciate the historic roots of American particularism. The hesitancies and fastidiousness which often marked the political conduct of Easterners, Virginians, and Jerseymen were interpreted by him as blind pig-headedness or stupidity. In Congress he nominally sat as a delegate from New York but primarily he represented Alexander Hamilton--and anyone else whose political sentiments happened to run parallel. Hamilton acted the member of parliament in a body designed to represent state legislatures.

Where Hamilton felt free to run like a frisky colt, Washington was saddled with heavy responsibilities and old political wisdom. Like Hamilton he felt that in a nation increasingly indulging itself in state prejudices "necessity alone can work a reform", even as he too might have pondered "how is this necessity to be produced, how is it to be applied, and how kept within salutary bounds?"[4]

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4. Hamilton to Washington, 17 March 1783, LMCC, 7:85-87, including footnote on page 86.

But as commander-in-chief of a moody, disgruntled army, Washington could not approve measures, whatever their quasi-logical beauties, which might easily disrupt the nation. Washington certainly held no brief for particularist attitudes, but he knew that the nation might touch even lower depths. The army, he warned Hamilton, was "a dangerous Engine to Work with, as it might be made to cut both ways." The army would be likely to throw its weight to that side which promised the quickest and greatest measure of relief "without looking forward (under the pressure of present want) to future consequences with the eyes of Politicians." Even as there were men in Congress who believed that the officer should make terms with his own state, there was an important group in the army that was not averse to turning to the states. Although they would be gratified if Congress were to make successful arrangements for them, they would also be antagonized if they thought that they were merely being used by a group in Congress to forward political aims of no moment to the army. That belief, Washington revealed, had at last taken root, with some of the leading men in the army subscribing to it. The conviction was strong that Robert Morris was at the bottom of the scheme. If such dangerous ideas were to persist and grow, Washington told Hamilton, in the end the nationalists' plans might boomerang against the funding program. No one, insisted Washington, was more opposed to state funds and local

prejudices than he, but the army's feeling had to be "attended to and soothed; and they assured that if Continental funds cannot be established, they will be recommended to their respective States for payment, justice must be done them." The plain sense of the matter demanded the satisfaction of the moderate wants of the army and then its disbandment without delay, concluded the General.[5]

Even those remarks did not exhaust Washington's criticism of current nationalist tactics in Congress. It was far from his wish to see the public creditors receive less than full payment. Nevertheless, Washington spurned the reasoning, so often exhibited before Congress by the Hamiltons and Wilsons, that denied the practicable nature of any plan giving a prior preference to the army. The nationalist spokesmen had been insistent that equal treatment to all debtors had to be the practice or the indispensable support of the civilian creditors would be lost. All creditors, commented Washington, deserved justice but in addition the army was deserving of special marks of gratitude--"to say that no distinction can be made between the claims of public creditors, is to declare that there is no difference in circumstances or, that the Services of all Men are equally alike." Of an army which had suffered years

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5. Washington to Hamilton, 4, 16 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 7:291-293, 323-326.

in the field and to whom peace promised only further years in financial difficulties, Washington asked: "Is there no discrimination then, no extra exertion to be made in favor of men under these circumstances in the hour of their military dissolution?" The General apparently recognized in 1783 that a financial program might be much more than a logical arrangement of tested fiscal truths. It was, in short, a political measure of greatest consequence because on its mode of working might depend the attitudes and actions of thousands of soldiers and officers. Disappointed, they might cock an ear to evil advisers. Remember, Washington warned, "tho' every Man in the Army feels the distress of his situation it is not every one that reasons to the cause of it."[6]

It is not possible to identify with complete certainty that segment of the army which, according to Washington, was inclined to place its fortunes in the hands of the state governments. Neither is it possible to identify the leaders of that group. Such little evidence as remains is, however, suggestive. It will be recalled that shortly before the Newburgh Addresses appeared, General Knox had pressed McDougall to seek a solution to the officers' pay problems which would have made the officers the creditors of the state, not of the national government.[7] During those

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6. Washington to T. Bland, 4 April 1783, ibid., 26:293-296.

7. See above p. 76.

feverish days, Knox's main support was found in several high ranking officers, most of whom belonged to the Massachusetts line. Soon after the commutation was enactd into the Congressional statutes a letter from General Lincoln was circulated among the troops. In the letter, Colonel Stewart claimed, Lincoln advised his Massachusetts brethren to reject continental securities. That policy, said the informant, was echoed by General Knox with such success that it appeared likely for a time that the Massachusetts line would "close with the proposals (of Lincoln)."[8] Perhaps the rancor and disgust so evident in the discredited Gates faction had driven Stewart to overstate the advice of Lincoln and Knox, but there is no reason to doubt a core of truth. Of Lincoln it has been said by one who was in a good position to know the facts that he had firmly repulsed attempts by Robert Morris to draw him into the Newburgh plot.[9] Lincoln's best friends were Massachusetts men. It is altogether likely therefore that the strong public antipathy in the Bay State toward the half-pay and commutation measures played a decisive role in determining Lincoln's political attitudes. The close ties between the average Eastern officer and his civilian brother was sourly attested to by General St. Clair: "I know the officers from

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8. J. Armstrong Jr. to H. Gates, 22 April 1783, LMCC, 7:150n.

9. S. Osgood to J. Adams, 7 December 1783, ibid., 378-388.

that country look so much to the civilian line of life, and are so fond of either garnering popularity among the citizens, or preserving what they have already, that no measure that would put that to a risk had much chance of going cordially down with them."[10]

The failure of the Newburgh Affair had returned the Northern officers to their old confused state of mind. The commutation act if accepted by the officers would have tied them by financial strands to the national government, but many officers, especially from the Eastern states, thought that their state governments would be a more reliable debtor if only the antagonisms in the states toward the officers could be soothed. The conciliation of the states might be achieved if the officers threw themselves on the mercy of their state governments. It was that belief, or hope, that probably led a nationalist like Knox to advocate a policy so detestable to other nationalists whose roots were in the middle or southern states. Knox seems to have been temporarily willing to set aside his political beliefs so that the officers might gain an immediate financial advantage. It would be foolish of course to underestimate Knox's hopes for his own private betterment which was bound to be dependent on those locally powerful Eastern politicians whose dislike of such nationalists as Hamilton, Robert Morris, and James Wilson fostered a strong inclination toward the

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10. St. Clair to General Irvine, 6 May 1783, St. Clair Papers, 1:583-84.

doctrine of state rights.

Washington's pleas on behalf of the army received a sympathetic audience from the harried Congress. Although a minority group in that body had bitterly fought the commutation, everyone was agreed that the army's accounts should be quickly settled and that the men of the army deserved an adequate payment on their large arrearages before they should be disbanded. Congress also felt a real debt of gratitude to Washington for the part he had played in quashing the Newburgh Affair, although various members were deeply concerned at the extreme steps that Washington had been forced to take in order to keep the reins over the army's back.[11] Unfortunately Congress's financial position was still desperate. And though the anti-nationalists and some nationalists had been greatly angered by the maneuvers of Robert Morris to create a crisis through his resignation, there were very few who did not find some truth in his gloomy reports on federal finances. They might doubt his pronouncement on 17 March that "our public credit is gone" and that Congress could no longer borrow abroad and that the states would not honor the requisitions; but there was no valid reason to doubt his assertion that the money available, added to the probable receipts from the states during April and May, would at most satisfy those prior

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11. Madison to E. Randolph, 25 March 1783, LMCC, 7:106.

obligation which would fall due in May.[12]

The demands of the army as transmitted by Washington were turned over to a Congressional committee of five in which Bland and Hamilton seem to have played leading roles.[13] When the committee met it was obvious to the members that one resolution passed by the officers at the conclusion of the Newburgh Affair could prove an impassable block to any Congressional attempts to satisfy the army's financial needs. That was the resolve not to disband until the accounts had been settled and proper funds established. In their ignorance of the complications that would arise during the settlement of accounts, members of Congress were inclined to believe that they could promise to accomplish that measure before disbanding the army; but to permit the army a continued existence at full strength until adequate funds were established was downright impossible. The financial measure on which the great majority of Congress based their hope for a successful solution to the debt problem was still in embryo though nearing acceptance by the national legislature. But that measure was a wonderful compromise designed to placate all except the most extreme anti-nationalists who would not accept a federal impost whatever limitations might be placed on the power of the federal government. At best such a precarious compromise

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12. R. Morris to Pres. of Congress, 17 March 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence.

13. JCC, 24:210n.

had considerable chance of failure while it was running the gauntlet of the thirteen state legislatures. Therefore it behooved Congress to assuage the tender fears of those states which eyed so jealously all encroachments on their sovereign powers. Under the most propitious of circumstances, the new financial measure would have to wait many months before the thirteenth state would give its approval. How the, the members of Congress asked, could it be practicable to promise the army not to disband it until the funding program had been established? The Eastern states were notoriously quick to suspect the worst of the nationalist leadership in Congress. Such a promise to the army would be interpreted by men of that persuasion as a scheme of Congressional nationalists to establish a large standing army with which to overawe the states. Thus the army would defeat its own financial purposes if it should insist on a continued existence after peace had come. A welter of other considerations also urged against such a Congressional promise. The large expenses required for the maintenance of the army would make it impossible for the nation to save money sufficient to commence servicing the public debt. An army with no occupation would also be a constant threat to the body politic--no duties and no work would permit all too much time for the contemplation of past misfortunes and inequities. Despite their assurances of trust in Congress even a minor incident misconstrued might bring officers and soldiers to illegal actions forever to be

condemned.[14]

Those considerations were quickly and confidentially passed on to Washington for comment. As a mere two weeks had passed since Washington had felt obliged at Newburgh to sponsor the officers' demands, it might appear at first glance that the Congressional committee was inviting renewed trouble with the officers and placing Washington in a most difficult position. But there was no longer a determined feeling among the officers. Peace seemed close at hand, for the army had already been officially congratulated on the news that the preliminary treaty had been signed.[15] Therefore when Washington called together "some of the most intelligent, well informed, and confidential officers" to consider the embarrassments of the Congressional committee, there was evidenced by those officers a conciliatory attitude.[16] They agreed with Washington that the two-weeks old resolutions were no longer truly representative of the wishes of the officer class. When originally voted, it had been expected that all the demands could have been satisfied by Congress before peace was concluded. That was no longer possible. So it was unanimously agreed by the officers that the expectation that Congress should retain the army intact until funds had been established was no longer

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14. Hamilton to Washington, 25 March 1783, Bland to Washington 25 March 1783, LMCC, 7:102-103,106,108.

15. Writings of Washington, 26:263-64.

16. Washington to Bland, 4 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:285-91. JCC, 24:253-54.

tenable. Nor, Washington wrote to the committee, did any officer harbor the idea that the army could coerce the nation--"The Tho't is reprobated as ridiculous and inadmissible." Nevertheless the army had certain definite expectations which "are of a very serious Nature and will require all the Attention and consideration of Congress to gratify them." As an aside it might be stated here that the following revised program probably mirrored Washington's views but it is impossible to say how accurately it bespoke the wishes of the officers in general. First, the army did not wish to be dissolved until every man had a statement of the total sum due him. While the accounts were being settled the troops should be kept together rather than dispersed to small camps in the various states. It might be true, as some in Congress were suggesting who favored de-centralization of the Northern army, that the officers and soldiers massed in their home states could bring considerable pressure to bear on the state legislatures to speed up such legislation as the new financial program, but Washington believed the benefits of dispersion were not weighty. On the other hand, he said, if the army were kept together, the settlement of accounts would be easier of execution and more economical to the nation. Nor should the psychological aspect be overlooked: if not forced to disperse, the men would be relieved of the jealous fear that the civil governments had no intention to honor the debts owed the army. After the accounts had been settled, Con-

gress should make certain that the army was provided with immediate cash. Realizing the tightness of American finances, the army expected no more than three months pay--but certainly not less. The army could not see why the nation could not make such a payment since the termination of the war would permit large cuts in the expenses of government. At least, said Washington, one month's pay could be made in cash while another two or three month's pay could take the form of "an absolute Assurance" guaranteed by Robert Morris. Some persons had suggested that Morris might give two month's pay in the form of drafts on the Receivers of continental revenues in the states against the unpaid parts of the 1782 requisition. Possibly such an arrangement would improve tax collections, for the men of the army would then have a stake in tax enforcement. But, those were merely suggestions, said Washington, the Superintendent of Finances would make the final arrangements. The important thing was to make a payment in some form. In addition to those financial requirements Washington made two suggestions that he believed would obviate serious difficulties attendant to disbandment. First, he asked for the creation of a special congressional committee including in its membership the Secretary of War and the Superintendent of Finances. Such a committee could do swift work if it came to the army. The drawn-out procedure of long letters between the Hudson and Philadelphia would be by-passed. The work of months could be telescoped into a few weeks. Moreover the army

would be gratified at such a display of national interest in its welfare. Washington's other proposal grew from a strong belief that once the definitive peace was declared, no official act would be able to hold in check the men who had enlisted to serve for the duration of the war. Hence Washington wanted this announcement made to the army simultaneously with the publishing of the peace announcement: that it would be optional for the War-Men, as those who had enlisted for the duration were frequently called, to remain in Camp until their accounts were settled or to leave immediately.

As soon as these reduced demands of the army were received in Philadelphia, the Congressional committee went into conference with the indispensable Financier. In Morris's hands rested the ability of Congress to satisfy the army's wishes for a speedy settlement of accounts and three month's pay. Morris told the committee that the settlement of accounts was proceeding as speedily as could reasonably be expected.[17] As for Washington's hope that the army would not be disbanded until the settlement were finished, Morris saw no need for a prolongation of the army's existence. The men could and should be dismissed, he counselled. Proper officers should be appointed to stay on with the remaining troops in order to help complete the

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17. Morris to a Committee of Congress, 14 April 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:370-377.

settlements. The three month's pay, he continued, was a most difficult problem. Hard money was out of the question; there simply was not a sufficiency to be had. The only alternative, therefore, was a paper anticipation to cover the whole amount. That would mean about $750,000, an undertaking of such magnitude that only the personal pledge of Morris himself would make the issue of such a sum feasible. It was not mere vanity, said Morris, which made him speak thus; it was the cold hard facts of American finances. Even so, the necessary arrangements would take considerable time, more than he could give in view of his imminent retirement. As he made the last point, one may be sure Morris found self-righteous satisfaction in being able to demonstrate to his bitterest opponents, including two committee members, how indispensable was his presence in the Department of Finances.[18]

The next move was up to the committee and Congress. The need for swift action had been heightened by the proclamation of Congress on 11 April of the cessation of hostilities necessitated by the receipt of official information that the preliminary treaty had been signed.[19]

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18. Osgood and Bland were constant critics of Morris. Indeed little more than one month before this conference, Bland had moved in Congress that the Finance office be reformed and had then followed up in the subsequent debate with a bitter indictment of Morris. JCC, 25:919-20.

19. Bland to G. Weedon, 11 April 1783, LMCC, 7:35.

Congress accepted the committee's view that the time of service for soldiers engaged to serve during the war did not rightfully expire until the ratification of the definitive treaty of peace. To those soldiers who served to the very end, Congress gave permission to keep their fire-arms and other accoutrements. But, in addition, it was left to the discretion of Washington, "if circumstances shall require it", to grant furloughs or discharges as he deemed expedient. Therewith Washington was given a means to cope with those "War-Men" whose ardent desire to get home might otherwise lead to excesses. Obviously, however, Congress expected that this weapon would be used sparingly and in only the most urgent cases. For Congress had not yet come to a decision on the proper mode of general disbandment. Nor did Congress at that time see fit to adopt Washington's request for a special committee to supervise personally the winding-up of affairs in the Hudson River Cantonment. The one most important decision made by Congress in reference to their committee's report was to ask Robert Morris to continue his office.[20]

The very next day, 24 April, a delegation from Congress requested Morris to reconsider his resignation, and the Financier agreed to stay on. Holding such a commanding position over Congress, Morris saw no reason why he should

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20. JCC, 24:269-71.

not take advantage of the opportunity to make completely clear the conditions and limitations of his acceptance. Let there be no doubt, said Morris, that Congress had come to him and, further, that Congress had pledged its support for the task he would assume. Nor should the fact be disguised, Morris insisted, that his acceptance was due only to his wish to aid the army at that critical juncture in its history. Most of all Morris wanted it definitely understood that his acceptance did not imply approval of Congress's great revenue act of 18 April.[21] Like Hamilton he considered that measure so much a compromise with the anti-nationalists, so much a palliative, that he would rather have seen nothing done than such a catch-all expedient. Without demeaning itself, Congress could not officially recognize in its resolves the egotistic terms laid down by Morris. In the end the Financier had to be satisfied with a brief resolve from Congress requesting his services "till arrangements for the reduction of the army can be made and the engagements that shall be taken by him in consequence as well as those already entered into shall be finally completed."[22]

For Robert Morris and Congress the overshadowing problem was the handling of the "War-Men" who made up well over one-half of the army. Morris had taken the position

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21. Morris to President of Congress, 1 May 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:399-403.

22. JCC, 24:283-85.

early in April that for financial reasons the swift disbandment of those soldiers was absolutely necessary. Since such a policy would obviously result in great economies, Morris enjoyed the rare luxury of seeing the Eastern congressmen join in support of his position. The split over this issue was clear cut. The delegates from Maryland and the states to the South were opposed at that moment to any dissipation of American armed strength. Among the Northerners there was a general willingness to support Morris's view. The division arose almost solely from the anxious wish of the Southern delegates to retrieve the many Negro slaves that the British armies had taken into their lines. General Carleton and the other British officials were at the moment indicating no intention of returning the human chattels to their Southern owners. Whatever chance for restitution might exist, the Southerners believed, would evaporate with the enfeeblement of the American army.[23] Although that fear was admitted by most Southerners, they naturally preferred to widen and generalize the base of their argument. Therefore they propagated the idea that disbandment was dangerous to the safety of the whole nation. Let us move with great caution in this affair, counselled Charles Carroll of Maryland and Rutledge of South Carolina. The latter member wanted the matter referred to Washington

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23. See, for example, the motion made by Mercer and seconded by Izard of South Carolina, JCC, 24:361.

but that suggestion found little support.[24] It was difficult to picture the British in New York as a fearful menace to the entire nation when the delegates from the states nearest the British in New York City, that is, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, were strongly in favor of discharging the troops.[25] Indeed the real military worth of the American troops was doubted by the Secretary of War himself, if the diary of Robert Morris tells the truth. Lincoln believed that in case peace did not last and another campaign was necessary the "War-Men" on the Hudson would not continue under their present enlistments.[26] Morris told members of Congress bluntly that "unless they are disbanded immediately the means of paying them, even with paper, will be gone." The Financier recommended that only West Point be left garrisoned. Each month the army remained in the field, he warned, it consumed the equal of two months' tax receipts.[27]

The Southern group was beaten but perhaps found some consolation in the mumbo-jumbo which encased the resolve

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24. JCC, 25:965-66.

25. Ibid.

26. Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:432n.

27. Morris to a Committee of Congress, 15 May 1783, ibid., 6:429-32.

first presented by one of their own number, Williamson of North Carolina. By a unanimous vote Congress resolved on 26 May that the War-Men be granted furloughs which would automatically become discharges as soon as the definitive treaty of peace should be concluded.[28] In addition, a proportionate number of officers were to be separated from the army under the same conditions.[29] The furloughed soldiers were permitted to keep their weapons as a manifestation of Congressional good-will although at least one member had considered the gesture as dangerous to internal order saying that America was at peace but that some people "could not separate the idea of a Briton from that of cutting throats."[30]

The decision to discharge reached Washington at a moment when the morale of the army was dwindling to pitiable proportions. The precipitous descent had begun as early perhaps as the failure of the Newburgh Affair. The passage of the commutation measure by Congress and the

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28. The certificate was worded thus:
"These are to certify, that the bearer hereof, _____, soldier in the _____, having faithfully served the United States _____, and being enlisted for the war, is hereby discharged from the American army.
"The within certificate shall not avail the bearer as a discharge until the ratification of the definitive treaty of peace, previous to which time, and until proclamation thereof shall be made, he is to be considered on furlough."
C. W. Butterfield, Washington-Irvine Correspondence (Madison, 1882), 189n.

29. JCC, 24:359, 364.

30. As reported by Madison, JCC, 25:966.

evident wish of that body to satisfy the army had briefly bolstered the spirits of the officer group. But two short weeks later it has been seen that the officers' expectations had been severely pruned. Once again the old sensations of being thwarted, of being unable to control their destiny were sinking many of the officer class in a sea of helplessness. All their hopes had been placed in the trembling hands of Congress. Even Washington could do little more than plead with his civil master. In the one field where he could still act, the settling of accounts, he did his utmost. As soon as he had received the procedural instructions from John Pierce, the Paymaster General, who was in charge of the settlement, Washington had aggressively pushed the matter along among his regimental paymasters.[31] Remembering too many examples in recent American history of a 'penny wise, pound foolish' approach, Washington urged on Pierce the swiftest action. He called on Pierce to use as many men as possible, regardless of immediate expense. For any expense thus incurred, said Washington, could not compare with the cost of keeping the whole army together even one additional day.[32] Informed by Pierce that the settlement of accounts could not be completed until the

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31. Writings of Washington, 26:281-82, 314.

32. Washington to John Pierce, 6 April 1783, ibid., 26:302.

accounts of the individual states with the soldiers of their respective lines were made available to the Paymaster General, Washington wrote a vigorous letter to all the state governments whose line troops were encamped on the Hudson asking them to forward the necessary materials with the greatest dispatch.[33]

The troubles that arose in camp to bedevil Washington after the Newburgh Affair came from a new direction, the non-commissioned officers and the private soldiers. Exactly what the 'common man' of the army had thought about the train of events in the first three months of the year is not known. Probably many had concluded that the activities of the officer delegation and the like had little reference to their own particular needs. Were they not being the dupes of an officer class which cared little for the welfare of the common soldier? What benefit to them was the new commutation act? None. The non-commissioned officers in the Connecticut line did not see why they should not receive proportionate benefits with the officers, and so they determined to petition the Commander-in-Chief.[34] Washington never lost his ability to cope with even the

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Writings of Washington

33. Washington to John Pierce, 6 April 1783, 26:318-19. Circular letter to the States, 14 April 1783.

34. Knox to Washington, 16 April 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 12:95. Washington to the President of Congress, 18 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:330-34.

most importunate demands of the officers, but the common soldiers were a different problem. Military etiquette forbade that Washington treat them as brothers to be soothed by earnest and affectionate words. Instead he had to resort to a time-tested military device when the non-commissioned officer's petition arrived at his desk. Writing to Hamilton of the new ferment Washington said of the petition: "It is well drawn I am told, but I did not read it; I sent it back without appearing to Understand the Contents, because it did not come through the Channels of their Officers."[35] Another petition of more moderate proportions originated with the Jersey soldiers, praying that they be given a tax exemption and that a certification to that effect should be stamped on their discharges.[36] Needless to say it was not in Washington's power to grant either of these petitions, only the states and Congress could give them substance. Yet if the petitions continued to increase they would contribute to growing unrest and anarchy in the army. Knox immediately scented great danger and by 14 April he was urging the desirability of discharging the soldiery as soon as possible. "Reasons may be given," said Knox, "that many men would want to attend to their farms in the present season, and that every attention ought to be paid to men deserving so much of their Country and therefore

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35. Washington to Hamilton, 22 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:350-353.

36. Ibid., 26:332, 332n.

that twenty or thirty from each regiment should be discharged upon each day." Before being released, however, the men should be given some pay and have a written promise that they would receive their settlement certificates later.[37] The final proviso can not hide the cracking facade-less than two weeks had elapsed since Washington had written to Congress of the officers' wish to see the army kept together until the accounts had been completely settled and already another retreat was being urged.

The petitions were a genuine discomfort to Washington and his general officers; but if the unrest had found its limits in such expressions the leaders of the army would not have been overly disturbed. The simple truth was, however, that the common soldier who had enlisted for the war no longer intended to stay in the army. To be sure he still anxiously looked forward to the payment of all arreages due him even as the officer did. But where the officer had dangling before him the possibility of pocketing thousands of dollars, the soldier was to receive a bonus of only $80.[38] Such a relatively slim reward could not override the common soldier's wish to get home. For months both rumor and official news had told him that the war was virtually over. Then on 28 March the general orders of the day carried letters of congratulations to the army from the

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37. Knox Papers (MHS), 12:95.

38. The value of the commutation ranged from $1400 for an ensign up to $9,960 for a major general.

French Minister and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, both announcing the conclusion of peace.[39] To be sure those letters had not been based on official documents, nor did they concern anything more than the preliminary peace treaty. Such nice distinctions, however, had no meaning to the average soldier; he was itching to be up and away.

It was then that Washington received from Congress the official proclamation ordering a cessation of hostilities. A most delicate situation was at hand for it was his duty to publish the pronouncement. Yet he knew that at once the soldiers enlisted for the war would cry out more boldly than ever for their discharges, and Congress had sent no instructions as to the manner in which Washington was to implement the proclamation. The General was so deeply disturbed as to entertain the idea of withholding the news from the army.[40] Still that would only be a postponement. How long could the publication be deferred? Until the pleasure of Congress might be known? In his quandary Washington turned to the general officers for their advice.[41] Unanimously they recommended an immediate publication fearing that a suppression of the news would only generate a mass of suspicions more dangerous by far

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39. Writings of Washington, 26:263-64.

40. Washington to the General Officers of the Army, 17 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:328-29.

41. Ibid.

to the stability of the army than the simple truth could ever be.[42] The next day, 18 April, the general orders carried the official proclamation to which Washington appended a few paragraphs of his own composition designed to meet the expected clamor for discharge.[43] He made clear that the proclamation was joyous news because it meant that the conflict was at last ended, not because it announced a general peace. Above all others he singled out for praise those soldiers who had enlisted for the duration of the war. "For these are the men who ought to be considered as the pride and boast of the American Army; and, who crowned with well earned laurels, may soon withdraw from the fields of Glory, to the more tranquil walks of civil life." All that remained to be done was to "close the Drama with applause." That meant, Washington warned, that no disorder or licentiousness would be tolerated. "Every considerate and well disposed soldier" would have to bear in mind that he must of necessity wait patiently until the definitive peace be declared or until Congress had taken measures properly to secure the public stores. Once that was done, avowed Washington, he did not expect any delay in discharging the army. "In the meantime he (the commander-in-chief) is determined that no Military neglects or excesses shall go unpunished

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42. Washington to the President of Congress, 18 April 1783, ibid., 26:330-34.

43. Ibid., 26:334-37.

while he retains the command of the army." Then ostensibly addressing the Adjutant General, the Chief of Engineers and the Quarter Master General, but with an eye probably cocked to the mass of the army, he ordered preparations to be made for the celebration of the definitive peace. The Quarter Master General was also ordered to busy himself at once with the printing of the discharges. To top it off, every man was to receive an extra ration of liquor on the morrow. Washington had pulled all the stops in the organ, but before he went to bed that evening he wrote Congress that he and his officers felt strongly that a policy on discharges should immediately be arrived at. Again he urged the appointment of a congressional committee with plenary powers to handle the dissolution of the army on the spot.[44]

Washington's fears were well founded. The proclamation was met with cries for discharge. Many soldiers believed that Congress had received more conclusive intelligence than was announced.[45] On the twenty-second, Washington ordered a special guard to be mounted by each brigade in order to preserve order.[46] Rioting had broken out and officers were being insulted as they tried to keep the men at their routine tasks. Washington suspected the intentions of the British in New York so that under normal conditions

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44. Washington to the President of Congress, 18 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:331-32.

45. J. Armstrong, Jr. to Gates, 22 April 1783, LMCC, 7:146n.

46. Writings of Washington, 26:354.

he would have favored holding a good-sized force in readiness until the British had gone. But "circumstanced as things now are," he wrote Hamilton, "I wish most fervently that all the Troops which are not retained for a Peace Establishment were to be discharged immediately, or such of them at least as do not incline to await the Settlement of their Accounts."[47] In that letter the General again urged a special committee to oversee the last hours of the army. If something of that sort were not done soon, he wrote, the continued delays would, at best, result in greater expenses, or, at worst, cause the army to break up in disorder and go home enraged, "committing enormities on the innocent Inhabitants in every direction."

At the end of April Washington received the Congressional resolve defining the 'War-Men's' term of service as extending to the ratification of the definitive treaty. Washington reprinted that resolve including the promise of Congress to let the men keep their arms.[48] Needless to say, the clause authorizing Washington to grant furloughs and discharges as he saw fit was not made public. By the first of May there was an expectation among the chief officers in the army that orders might arrive at any moment from Congress

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47. Washington to Hamilton, 22 April 1783, ibid., 350-53.

48. Ibid., 372.

to discharge the 'War-Men'.[49] Before that climactic event took place, however, Washington had to fall back on the discriminatory power vested in him by the Congressional resolve of 23 April. General Huntington while forwarding to the Commander a memorial from the sergeants of the Connecticut line asked that furloughs be granted to some of the more impatient soldiers. To that request Washington gave his assent.[50] That same day, 14 May, Washington suggested that Knox take similar action. Furlough any soldier mutinously inclined for any length of time the soldier might wish, he said; "We are better off without them than with them."[51] Whether or not Huntington and Knox saw fit to follow Washington's advice and rid their commands of troublemakers is not known. Probably little if any use was made of that emergency weapon since the orders from Congress to discharge the 'War-Men' arrived only two weeks later.

Little has been said of the officers during the month of April, and for a sufficient reason: the common soldier had elbowed his way to the forefront and dominated the stage. In taking the initiative with their clamor for discharges, the soldiery had demonstrated a fatal weakness

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49. General J. Huntington to Andrew Huntington, 1 May 1783, Huntington Papers(CHS), 20:463.

50. Washington to J. Huntington, 14 May 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:429, 429n.

51. Washington to Knox, 14 May 1783, ibid., 429-30.

of the officers' position: in themselves they had little power, only so long as the soldiers remained tractable and disciplined was there real strength in the officers corps. It is not necessary to take the embittered comments of the Gates' faction at even a small fraction of their face value, and yet be able to believe that the officers' morale drooped badly as they contemplated their own impotence. When Colonel Ogden returned to Philadelphia in late April from the Highlands preparatory to a business trip to France, he told the author of the Newburgh Addresses that the officers regretted having let slip the great opportunity that the Newburgh Affair had offered and "like contemptible sinners...beyond the prospect of salvation, wish to have it to do over again." But, said Ogden, no ties nor promises would any longer hold the soldiery "and with them will every loitering hope of ours break also."[52]

The crisis was full upon the officers when on 2 June the Congressional resolve of 26 May to furlough the 'War-Men' and a proportional number of officers was announced in the general orders of the day accompanied by instructions to implement the resolve. The officers were ordered to agree among themselves as to who would stay and who would go with the troops. Regimental paymasters and the regimental agents assisting the paymasters were to continue with the army so that when the accounts were settled those representatives

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52. J. Armstrong, Jr. to Gates, 29 April 1783, LMCC, 7:155n.

could carry the final settlement certificates back to the states for distribution to the disbanded troops. The army contractors were instructed to gather adequate provisions at points along the homeward routes so that the returning troops might be well cared for during their last military tramp. All soldiers in confinement were granted a full pardon and liberated.[53] In truth, the command of the army seemed prepared to move with unprecedented speed once the green light had been flashed from Philadelphia..

Several days earlier, sensing that their days in uniform would be few, many officers talked of staying on in the army until their demands were satisfied. But it was too late for any forthright action. For once Colonel Stewart's vindictive cyncism was completely appropriate when he scornfully brushed aside such talk as impossible.[54] The sole result of the new ferment among the officers was a letter of 5 June addressed to Washington and signed by Major General Heath as president of the general officers and regimental commanders.[55] The voice was weak, more likely to rouse compassion than any other sentiment. After paying grateful tribute to Washington's constant solicitude for the army, the officers said it was "with a mixture of astonishment and chagrin that we view the late resolve of Congress."

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53. Writings of Washington, 26:463-65.

54. Stewart to Gates, 28 May 1783, Emmett Collection (NYPL) No. 5409.

55. Heath, Memoirs, 344-46.

None of the objects so important to the officers had been accomplished, and yet they were being turned out penniless and broken. The heart of the letter was a request that Washington amend the order so that no officer or soldier would have to accept his furlough-discharge until he had been paid and until certificates covering all his accounts had been turned over to him. Washington's reply on the next day supported the spirit of the Congressional resolve adducing in its favor the arguments of economy advanced by Robert Morris. Nor did Washington feel qualified to set aside an order of Congress, for "I am only a servant of the public." However, a furlough being an act of benevolence and not of compulsion, Washington allowed that it could be either accepted or refused--provided always that a proportionate number of officers would have to accompany the soldiers who chose to leave. Accordingly Washington ordered that all non-commissioned officers and privates who wished to remain in camp should hand in their names so that an equal number of men whose enlistments had not yet expired might take advantage of the furlough opportunity. Washington obviously was resolved that the size of the army was going to be cut down and the necessary economies made. Knowing the eagerness of the great mass of the soldiers to return home, it is difficult to picture any of them giving up their furlough opportunity to another soldier. Especially was it unlikely when Washington further informed them that those surrendering their furloughs would continue to do duty

until the ratification of the definitive treaty of peace.[56] Some time before, the fiction that the day of final peace lurked just around the corner had died a wistful death. Plainly, what Washington had granted to the officers was a little bit of nothing.

Even as Washington was publishing the furlough order he received a letter from Robert Morris telling him that the continued expenses of the army during May had made it financially impossible for the Financier to issue notes payable at two, four, and six months from date as he had first hoped. At best, all the notes would have to run for six months and if expenses were not immediately reduced, notes of any kind would be impracticable. As to when those notes would be ready, Morris did not say, though he implied that they were about to be issued.[57] That was the full extent of Washington's knowledge on the progress of the payment due the army when he issued his orders of 2 June to disband. That same day the Commander sent off a special messenger to speed the notes from Morris to camp. In a letter sent with this messenger, Washington expressed great apprehension to Robert Morris over the consequences to be expected if the notes did not arrive in time to pay the furloughed men and officers.[58] Doubtless Washington was expressing there an

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56. Heath, Memoirs, 26:471-72.

57. R. Morris to Washington, 29 May 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:454-55.

58. Washington to the Supt. of Finance, 3 June 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:466-67.

honest fear yet he was not fully parting the curtains on his inner turmoils. If he had only feared the consequences of non-payment, surely he would have temporized and held the troops a few more days or even weeks. The six-months notes actually were brought to camp only two weeks after the order of 2 June was issued.[59] Instead the evacuation of the Highlands began the very day Washington wrote to Morris. Two days later the small Maryland battalion departed. The following forenoon the New Jersey line marched out of camp. A few hours later one of the two New York regiments presented their standards to Governor Clinton and then proceeded to Poughkeepsie for final dissolution. And so it went until on the eighth of June the Massachusetts line, which was the core of the Northern army, began to move off, division by division, headed cross the Hudson towards the hills and coasts of home.[60] What else could have caused the military wheels to turn with such unwanted rapidity except an overwhelming fear in the hearts of the generals that further procrastination could only beget anarchy. To avoid that most infamous conclusion Washington was prepared to run all other risks.

By the eleventh of June most of the eligible men had

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59. President of Congress to the Ministers Plenipotentiary at Paris, 15 July 1783, LMCC, 7:221.

60. Heath, Memoirs, 343 ff.

left the Highlands behind them.[61] The army had been cut in little more than a week to one-third its former strength. Reorganized, the remaining troops were sufficient only to make an adequate garrison for West Point.[62] It had been a ticklish situation and Washington was well out of it indeed. As he told Congress, "the business got more happily over than could be expected."[63]

But there had been considerable discontent. The officers who had pleaded most pitifully to be kept in service were helpless. When the soldiers showed no inclination to remain in camp, most of the officers had by the terms laid down by Washington no choice but to accompany their men home.[64] Under such conditions it is not hard to believe that there was "universal dissatisfaction" in the officer ranks. The failure of both Washington and Congress to perform even the simplest act of good-will, namely, the presentation to the officers of thanks and congratulations for hard services well done, only deepened resentments.[65] Possibly, even

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61. Washington to Rev. John Rodgers, 11 June 1783, Writings of Washington, 27:1.

62. Washington to Pres. of Congress, 24 June 1783, ibid., 32-35.

63. Washington to Pres. of Congress, 18 June 1783, ibid., 19-20.

64. The only 'War-Men' who chose to remain in the army were some whose homes still lay within the British lines. Ibid., 32-35.

65. Pickering to Hodgdon, 12 June 1783, Pickering, Pickering, 1:473.

probably, the willingness of the New York and New Jersey officers to honor Baron Steuben with affectionate farewell addresses while failing to do the same for the Commander-in-Chief was a pointed if oblique rebuke to Washington.[66] And it is probably also true that a last-minute proposal of a farewell dinner for the whole officer corps was scotched by the prevailing attitude that the moment was more suited to sorrow than mirth.[67] The obvious implication of those events has, however, found no explicit proof that a grave and deep split had opened between Washington and the officer class. The story which was soon causing much talk in Virginia to the effect that Washington was so unpopular with his officers that none would dine with him smacks strongly of the intemperate and embittered Gates' group.[68] At least Theodorick Bland and Arthur Lee saw fit to deny strongly that Washington had lost any of his popularity.[69] As a

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66. So Pickering suggests in the letter cited immediately above. It should be remembered, however, that Pickering had long taken a sullen pleasure in depreciating Washington. For copies of the farewell addresses to Steuben and his replies, see Pennsylvania Packets, 26 June and 31 June 1783.

67. W. Stewart to Gates, 20 June 1783, Emmett Collection (NYPL) No. 8028.

68. Possibly this story had its source in an extravagant interpretation placed by Gates on the information in the above cited letter from Stewart.

69. Harrison to Virginia delegates, Bland and Lee to Harrison, 12, 27 July 1783, LMCC, 7:238, 238n.

matter of fact, a discussion of the trend in Washington's popularity was of no great moment. Far more important was the question of Washington's ability to maintain his position as the accepted spokesman and leader of the officer class. The events of the next months demonstrated conclusively his continued paramountcy.

In cursory retrospect the days from March through June of 1783 seem to have been marked only by futility as far as the intentions of the army officers were concerned. Actually there were two developments which won little public attention at the time but proved later to have such persistent vitality as to leave interesting imprints on the course of American history. One of the events was the birth of a scheme to plant a military colony in the newly-won Ohio country. The other was the formation of the Society of the Cincinnati.

The interest of some American soldiers and officers in Western lands doubtless went back to the days before independence had become a fighting word in the colonies. More particularly, however, Congressional resolves in the years 1776 and 1780 gave substance to that interest for the federal government therein provided that every officer and soldier enlisted to serve until the war's end would receive land bounties varying in size from 100 acres for a private up to 1,100 acres for a major-general. In the swirl of battle and financial difficulties, neither Congress nor the promised recipients seem to have given much

thought to the ways and means by which those promises would be transformed into realities. But with the ample opportunities provided by the inactivity of 1782-1783 to think of many things, it was natural enough that some minds would concern themselves with land grants. It was no mere accident that the land bug should have bitten the army hard in the first days of April 1783. One need not resort to a post hoc, propter hoc type of logic in order to show the connections between the failure of the Newburgh Affair, the general despondence of the officer class, and the strong interest in Western lands. Increasingly evident became the hard fact that the army was likely to leave the service with nothing but promises to pay pledged by a government in constant need of funds. By the winning of the war, however, the federal government was coming into possession of huge expanses of Western lands. There was a commodity in which the government was rich. There was a commodity that had a worth at least the equal of state and continental monies.

Once again it is difficult to single out one man or even a group of men who began the land agitation in April. Timothy Pickering, the Quarter-Master General, was from the beginning an ardent advocate of an elaborate plan to endow the army with a wealth of Western acres. At the time he was still viewing most favorably an old intention to set himself up in the commission business at Philadelphia. But if that failed, he was strongly determined "not to return to Massachusetts to peddle in trade or starve in a public

office;" instead he would settle in "a new country, where, if my life is spared for a few years, I can at least leave a plantation to each of my children."[70] Just how many other officers from New England then shared Pickering's resolve to seek newer and richer vistas is unknown. Pickering claimed that some of the principal officers of the army were heartily engaged in the plan. Since Generals Huntington and Putnam were at that date considering the earliest draft of the plan there is no need to doubt the immediate and wide interest of the officer class.[71] Possibly the strongest proponents came from that coterie of officers which had backed Knox and Washington in the defeat of the Newburgh Affair. That was the indignant belief of the Gates' group who, still smarting from their recent defeat, saw in the plan nothing but absurdity and trickery. It originated, they agreed, "with men who wish only to amuse and divert the army from the consideration of more important concerns."[72]

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70. Pickering to Hodgdon, 6 April 1783, Pickering, Pickering, 1:456.

71. Pickering to Hodgdon, 7 April 1783, ibid., 457.

72. J. Armstrong, Jr. to Gates, 22 April 1783, LMCC, 7:150n. Gates, who had departed for Virginia immediately after the collapse of the Newburgh Affair, received most of his information on subsequent events in camp from his former aides and friends, Stewart, Richmond, and Armstrong. Gates accepted invariably the interpretations of those men. Therefore he labelled the land scheme as "Utopian." Gates to Pickering, 19 May 1783, Pickering, Pickering, 1:465-66.

The plan, as will be evident, was indeed grandiose, perhaps "absurd," as those critics said. Yet it was certainly more than a plan to divert the officers. If it had been nothing more, it is unlikely that a man like Pickering, who was so critical of the role played by Washington and the Knox group during the Newburgh Affair, would have been so eager in its support. Indeed the original propositions were by some ascribed to Pickering himself, with how much truth it is impossible to say.[73]

The first plan to be drawn up and subsequently to undergo considerable revision was titled "Propositions for Settling a new state by such officers and soldiers of the federal army as shall associate for that purpose."[74] Since there were fifteen propositions and since many aspects of the total problem found their way into the propositions, it is easy to overlook the dominant idea behind the plan: it was a method by which the federal government might expeditiously satisfy the financial claims of the officers and soldiers. As will be seen, the plan as finally revised

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73. It is said that when Hodgdon showed the original plan to Stephen Higginson, a school friend of Pickering, Higginson exclaimed, "This is Pickering, I swear." So, if it were not the product of Pickering's own mind, the plan at least came from a kindred spirit. Ibid., 458.

74. To be found in both Pickering, Pickering, 1:546 and W. P. Cutler and Julia Perkins, Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler...(2 vols., Cincinnati, 1888), 1:156-59.

did not drop the financial considerations, but it did place much greater emphasis on the military worth of such a colony. The original propositions contemplated the purchase by the federal government from the Indians of the land between Lake Erie and the Ohio River bounded on the east by Pennsylvania and on the west by a north-south line running some thirty miles west of the Scioto River. On that vast tract the army would find the redemption of the nation's promises of a land bounty. To encourage actual settlement additional quantities of land should be given to the officers and men so that a major-general might receive a maximum total of 2400 acres, while a private would get 600 acres. Surplus land would be the property of the state and used for building roads, schools, and the like. Sales of the surplus would help defray the cost of government. To insure actual settlement, forfeiture of land holdings would be the punishment for failure to erect a house and to bring a certain minimum of land under cultivation within a stipulated time limit. Realizing the numerous difficulties that would obstruct such a huge development, the propositions called on the United States government virtually to subsidize the total cost of establishing the state. The government would pay for the transportation out, for the "necessary utensils of husbandry," for a minimum of livestock, for subsistence rations for every man, woman, and child during the first three years, for an annual suit of clothes for every soldier, and for arms to combat Indian marauders. Those costs would

be charged against the arrearages owed to the individual soldiers. Politically the great tract was to be created and given form by the men who associated together to settle the new land. They would meet prior to beginning the settlement, and then and there make a constitution, draw up laws, and elect delegates to represent the new state in Congress. Only one specific idea to be included in such a constitution was laid down in the preliminary propositions: "The total exclusion of slavery from the state to form an essential and irrevocable part of the Constitution."

During the next two months General Rufus Putnam made the plan practically his own. His interest was high and his influence among New England troops considerable.[75] He composed an extremely brief letter addressed to Congress and signed by 288 officers, including most of the important officers in the Hudson encampment as well as a host of ensigns, lieutenants, and captains.[76] Though the finished letter was dated 16 June it had been composed at least as early as 7 May.[77] Congress was reminded in this letter of its resolves to give land bounties. The same tract of land that the original fifteen propositions described was sug-

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75. Pickering to Hodgdon, 14 April 1783, Cutler, Cutler, 1:149.

76. Ibid., 159-167.

77. A copy bearing this date is to be found in Rowena Buell, Memoirs of Rufus Putnam (Boston and New York, 1903), 215-216.

gested in this letter as being particularly agreeable to the army. In conclusion Congress was asked to make provision that further grants in that territory might be made to those in the army who wished "to become adventurers in the New Government, in such quantities and on such conditions of settlement and purchase, for public securities, as Congress shall judge most for the interest of the intended government, and rendering it of lasting consequence to the American Empire." With those words the petitioning letter closed. The elaborate details that made up the original propositions had been reduced to these simple requests.

There were cogent arguments to be produced for the military colony, but Putnam preferred to place them in a quasi-private letter[78] to General Washington who in turn transmitted the letter accompanied by his own supporting views to Congress. In considerable detail Putnam urged on Washington the military desirability of a string of forts extending from the Ohio River north to Lake Erie. That arrangement would make possible the swiftest, surest route of supply to those key defense points in the Great Lakes region that the United States woul presumably maintain or erect in order to guard the new territories and to assure American control of the fur trade in that great area.

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78. Memoirs of Rufus Putnam (Boston and New York, 1903) 216-223. This copy is a draft which varies only slightly from the finished letter which is to be found in Cutler, Cutler, 1:167-72.

The proposed forts would also effectively seal off the whole frontier regions of New York and Pennsylvania from Indian incursions starting in the West. Thus, connected with another chain of forts running east-west through central New York and with a set of forts already established in the Pennsylvania-Virginia region, the proposed fortified erections would represent a huge defensive circle. In Putnam's mind these military factors were evidently viewed as good selling points. In the manner and quantities of land grants, Putnam followed closely the path laid down in the original propositions. But one new point he felt impelled to make: some of the officers were much opposed to large patents believing them to be injurious to the country because they retarded settlement and because they threw "too much power in the hands of the few." Washington approved of the views presented by Putnam, in part at least because the suggested chain of forts and the general theory of defense involved closely adhered to Washington's own ideas on the peace-time organization of America's military forces. But Washington also agreed with the other aspects of Putnam's plan. To Congress he wrote, "I will venture to say it is the most rational and practicable Scheme which can be adopted by a great proportion of the Officers and Soldiers of our Army, and promises them more happiness than they can expect in any other way."[79]

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79. Writings of Washington, 27:16-18.

Naturally enough the bright promise of the western lands was kindling similar plans among other groups in the American army. An undetermined number of Pennsylvania officers got behind a scheme considerably less involved and perhaps therefore more likely of success than the aforementioned plans.[80] The Pennsylvania proposition shows no apparent interest in the colonization and defense of the West. It was simply a method whereby Congress could discharge its debt to the army almost immediately. Congress was requested by this plan to grant warrants for land anywhere in the new Western empire, with a preference being expressed for a huge tract directly and immediately west of the area suggested by General Putnam. After the liquidation of the army accounts, the soldiers and offficers of the Continental army would have the sole right for six months to apply for the warrants. Then the sales would be thrown open to any buyers. The proponents maintained that the army was sure to approve this scheme since no soldier was compelled to take the warrants, "tho' it is more than probable very few will refuse, as they can sell them for the prime cash." The public would be unlikely to complain for they would thus be painlessly relieved of a heavy debt.

It is no part of the intention held by this writer to go further with the story of the army and Western lands. For the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient to note that

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80. Salem Gazette, 14 August 1783.

Congress for various reasons, including the failure of some states to make prompt and proper cessions of their western claims to the federal government, postponed all action on Western land schemes for many months.[81] Not only were all petitions from the army therewith buried but also several proposals offered by members of Congress themselves. Among the latter were included a resolve to issue certificates for land to eligible soldiers and officers when they were discharged. Another resolve similarly tabled was originated by Bland and seconded by Hamilton which would have wiped out the whole army debt by the exchange of thirty acres of Western land for each dollar owed by the federal government to the men of the army.[82]

The second event of some significance in American history, which had its origin in the last days of the existence of the Northern Army, was the birth of the Society of the Cincinnati, an organization of and by the American officer class. Some have said that the impetus to the formation of this society came from a group of officers who, impressed with the dangers of the doctrine that animated the Newburgh Affair, "determined to mark their disap-

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81. The Putnam plan was read on 1 July and then referred to committee where it remained buried. JCC, 24:421n.

82. Ibid., 24:383, 384-86; 25:968.

probation by some signal device."[83] There is a measure of truth in that assertion: several of the moving spirits in the new organization had not approved of the Newburgh Plot. However, there is no indication that the founders had any interest in expressing disapprobation of a dead horse--and certainly the Newburgh Affair was just that by April 1783. The Society was a forward-looking affair, careless of past milestones.

General Knox was the father of the Society, abetted by his aide-de-camp, Major Samuel Shaw. Among others who early helped to foster the organization was General Huntington of the Connecticut line.[84] As far as can be learned, not one of the army group that sparked the Newburgh Affair was instrumental in the organization of the Society. Doctor William Eustis, one of the few Massachusetts men known to have worked intimately with the Gates' faction in the Spring of 1783, later attributed the idea of the Society to Captain Richmond, an aide-de-camp of Gates. There is not only no corroborating evidence for that statement but also his brief description of the circumstances attending the begin-

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83. Alexander Johnston, "Some Account of the Society of the Cincinnati", Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 6(1858):21-22.

84. Quincy, Shaw, 111. Huntington Papers (CHS) 20:XIII-XIV.

nings of the Society is patently false.[85] It is altogether unlikely that the friends of Gates were as yet willing to cooperate with Knox in any venture. Even two months later Colonel Stewart was speaking of "K____and the Junto" with extreme bitterness as he watched the success with which the Commander at West Point got his way in the management of the army.[86]

The first draft of the Society's constitution, or "Institution" as it was officially and commonly called, is known as Knox's Proposals.[87] That paper is dated 15 April, coincidentally one day later than our first intimation that Knox wanted to see the disbandment of the army come as soon as possible. The completed Institution, which was ready for the approval of the whole officer class by 10 May,

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85. James M. Bugbee, ed., Memorials of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati (Boston, 1890). 531-532. Eustis claimed that Richmond made his suggestion "sometime after the orders of Congress for disbanding the army were known in camp." If true, that would date Richmond's suggestion as no earlier than the last week of May. On the other hand, Knox'x ideas were set down in ink on a paper dated 15 April.

86. Stewart to Gates, 20 June 1783, Emmett Collection (NYPL), No. 8028.

87. Winthrop Sargent, "Journal of the General Meeting of the Cincinnati in 1784," Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 6 (1858): 61. A photostat of the Proposals can be found in Francis S. Drake, Memorials of the Society of the Cincinnati (of Massachusetts) (Boston, 1873), between pp. 6 and 7. A side-by-side comparison between the Proposals and the final Institution is provided in John Schuyler, Institution of the Cincinnati...with Extracts...from the Transactions of the New York State Society (New York, 1886), 13-18.

represented few important changes from the original ideas of Knox.[88] Those who signed the document pledged themselves to three principles which "shall be immutable and form the basis of the Society of the Cincinnati." First, "An incessant attention to preserve inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature, for which they have fought and bled, and without which the high rank of a rational being is a curse instead of a blessing." Second, "An unalterable determination to promote and cherish, between the respective states, that union and national honor so essentially necessary to their happiness, and the future dignity of the American Empire." Third, "To render permanent the cordial affection subsisting among the officers" which necessarily entails "substantial acts of beneficence" to needy officers and their families. The forms and procedures of the Society were also laid down in the Institution. Paralleling the political structure of the nation, there was to be a General Society and thirteen state societies which were to be quite independent of the General Society. If necessary, there might be district societies within a state society. At each meeting of the societies the principles of the Institution were to be fully considered "and

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88. Full reprints of the Institution are to be found in many books. Most recently it has been made available in Edgar Erskine Hume, General Washington's Correspondence concerning The Society of the Cincinnati (Baltimore, 1941), 2-3.

the best measures to promote them adopted." Each state society was to send at least once a year a circular letter to the other state societies "noting whatever they may think worthy of observation, respecting the good of the Society, or the general union of the States." To insure the Society's ability to carry out its benevolent intentions, a fund was to be established by each state society. Membership was to be limited to those who had served three years as an officer in the Continental armies. Those members were known as "original" members. In addition upon death of an original member, the right to membership would descend to the nearest male relative. Honorary members might be elected, but their membership could not be inherited. Their number was never to exceed a ratio of 1 to 4 in any society. In order to give real tone and to provide the necessary concrete symbols without which many an organization both ancient and modern would be meaningless to its members, there were to be a distinctive medal and diploma. Finally a fund was to be set up whereby impoverished members and their families could be extended a helping hand. Each member on joining the Society was required as an admission fee to contribute one month's pay out of his military salary. It was hoped that membership dues and generous donations would insure the eventual establishment of a sizeable fund.

Turn those big dedication phrases around as much as one wishes, there will never come a crystal-clear answer

as to what it all meant. Was the Society conceived by its inceptors as a purely social and benevolent organization? Did the officers who became its members take seriously the transcendent aspirations and goals embodied in the lush "immutable" principles? There can be no final answer, one can only hypothesize. There is a sort of negative proof of the suspicion that none of the members then saw in the Society a potentially powerful coercive machine: during the first months of its existence the Society was almost never mentioned even in confidential correspondence. That fact might conceivably suggest great secrecy; more likely it meant a slightness of interest in comparison with the immediate problems attendant on the imminent dissolution of the main army. Certainly no attempt was made to use the infant Society in calling a halt to the disbanding order. The president of the regimental commanders in the 5 June protest was Major-General Heath, and he was boggling at even becoming a member of the Cincinnati. Moreover, was it likely that Knox, with his extreme sensitivity to the public opinion of New England, would consciously attempt to construct a machine with purposes sure to arouse deep antagonisms? There seems no good reason to suspect Knox's honesty when he assured General Lincoln that, "The intention is pure and uncorrupted by any sinister design; the sole objects, the union of the States, as far as the humble influence of the officers may extend, and to erect some lowly shelter for the unfortunate against the storms and

tempests of poverty."[89] Nor is it likely that Knox and Washington, who early gave his approval to the fledgling Society, envisaged their creation as a powerful lobby or extra-legal force despite the high flown phrases anent the safe guarding of the union.

Few officers had qualms about becoming members. General Stark, the senior New Hampshire officer in camp, would have nothing to do with the Society.[90] His reasons are not known. Much more interesting is the spectacle of the skittish General Heath. From the very first, according to Knox, he was one of the few not warmly in favor of the Society. In prophetic jest, Knox wrote of him that "with a sagacity peculiar to himself, he thinks through the mist he sees spirits and hobgobblins of hideous forms, and no popularity."[91] Even so, Heath did not doubt that the Society was formed primarily "to perpetuate friendships."[92] His fears were aroused not because he saw in the Society a political machine but rather because of the lordly airs implied in a diploma, a medal, and the like. It appeared too much like a military or noble order likely to be associated in the popular mind with counter parts in foreign

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89. Drake, Mass. Cincinnati, 16. 21 May 1783.

90. New Hampshire Society of the Cincinnati, The Institution and Records of...(Concord, N. H. 1893, 56.

91. Drake, Mass. Cincinnati, 16.

92. Heath, Memoirs, 349-50.

kingdoms.[93] If he had had his way, the Society would have been of Spartan simplicity: "for the purpose of a social hour, and to brighten the chain of friendship, with a fund for the relief of the unfortunate of their brethren." One can only wonder at the reason for the unique insight of General Heath. To be sure he had been at home in Roxbury all winter not returning to camp until April; and that sojourn had at least given him the opportunity to become intimate with the growing clamor in Massachusetts against the officer class occasioned by the half-pay and commutation controversies. Yet numerous other officers had also been home during the winter, including Generals Putnam and Huntington. Despite his doubts, Heath presided at one of the organizing meetings during May and he also transmitted copies of the Institution to the senior officers of the state lines not represented in the Hudson Cantonment. In the end, he also became a member, though a most grudging and inactive one. He did so, according to his own word, because he feared his posterity in years to come might have thought his failure to join was due to some misconduct.[94] The reason may sound weak but evidently there was considerable pressure among the officers for uniformity. Timothy Pickering claimed many years later that though he was opposed to the Society because of its pompous insignificance, he had

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93. Heath, Memoirs, 350.

94. Ibid.

joined "purely to avoid the reproach of singularity."[95]

In June as the great migration homeward began, a convention of officers met under the presidency of General Steuben to elect temporary officers for the General (or National) Society until a full-fledged meeting would be possible sometime in 1784. Naturally enough, Washington was elected President-General while Knox was chosen Secretary-General and Alexander McDougall, Treasurer-General. It may have been, as rumor had it, that the officers would not dine with Washington, but they certainly wished to have his name emblazoned at the head of their roster. During June the state societies of Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey New Jersey were activated while most of the officers of those states were still in uniform. In the Massachusetts Society one notes the familiar names of Lincoln, Knox, and Brooks selected to fill respectively the offices of president, vice-president, and secretary.[96] The same offices in the New York society were filled by McDougall, Governor Clinton, and Benjamin Walker.[97] The election among the New Jersey officers was held at the

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95. Pickering, Pickering, 1:523-24. From a statement made by Pickering in 1823.

96. Drake, Mass. Cincinnati, 45.

97. Schuyler, N. Y. Cincinnati, 77-78.

deactivating center in that state, Elizabethtown.[98] Only the name of the president, General Elias Dayton, need be noted here. The lines of most other states not being present in the Highlands were unable to organize their societies until several months later.

With the great reduction in the army effected, the story returns to a familiar locale, Philadelphia. So inured had Congress become to the rapid succession of crisis and solution in army affairs, that the members were perhaps in danger of failing to appreciate fully the reality of the pitfalls skirted by Washington. They read Washington's letters relating to the disbandment of the army and likely the great majority were satisfied to write relieved conclusions to the story much like this one: "By this prudent, wise and noble conduct of General Washington gathered discontents, which now seemed again ready to burst forth, were once more happily assuaged, and the Resolution of Congress was quietly complied with."[99] One event sternly forbade continued complacency. The exciting drama rehearsed in the Highlands received an unexpected performance on the great stage of Philadelphia. Unfortunately for the thrill-seekers,

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98. New Jersey Society of the Cincinnati, The Institution... together with the Roll of the Original, Hereditary, and Honorary Members of the Order in New Jersey (Albany, 1866), 26.

99. Virginia Delegates to Gov. B. Harrison, 17 June 1783, in LMCC, 7:188-89.

the cast was starless and of only third-rate competence. Several hundred soldiers belonging to the Pennsylvania and Maryland lines were shepherded along the mutiny road by a few officers of low rank and obscure name. For the purpose of this paper it matters little that the troops were largely new recruits, or that a sizeable force from the main army was hurried down to restore order. Even the fact that an indignant Congress hiked up its skirts and stomped across the Delaware to enjoy the isolation provided by the rural college town of Princeton is not of great import.[100] One main result, however, that sparked from the indignation suffusing Congress was an intent to find out why the main army had not been paid before its break-up and why the troops barracked only a few minutes' walk from the office of the Financier had not been satisfied.

Congress asked an accounting of these facts from Robert Morris and further desired him to report on the best way to obviate further difficulties.[101] The rebellious soldiers had complained strongly about the failure to settle their accounts and to get their pay.[102] It took Morris but

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100. A thorough story of the mutiny is to be found in Varnum Lansing Collins, The Continental Congress at Princeton (Princeton, 1908).

101. JCC, 24:406, 20 June 1783.

102. President of Congress to Washington, 21 June 1783, LMCC, 7:193-94.

a few hours to make his reply. Congress, with a hundred and one things to occupy its attention, had failed to order included in the settlement of accounts the sums due to officers for rations and clothing. Morris brought attention to that fact. Then he pointed to the main and continuing difficulty: the states and certain departments of the federal government were slow in sending along final accounts of the advances they had made to the officers of the line. Congress responded immediately with a resolution that all accounts should be finally settled with the utmost dispatch.[103] The certificates that were printed for that purpose were known as "final settlement" certificates, or sometimes as "Pierce notes". Some ninety thousand were issued.[104]

Obviously Morris had not answered all the questions that were popping into the minds of some members of Congress, especially of that Massachusetts-Virginia axis which deeply suspected the good faith and intentions of the Financier. It was Higginson and Holten who led Congress to ask ex-

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103. JCC, 24:426-27. 4 July 1783.

104. Writings of Washington, 27:53n. The certificate read as follows:

No._____State of 1783. On the final settlement of an account between the United States and_____ there appeared to be due to him the sum of_____ Dollars, I do therefore certify, that the said sum is payable with interest at six percent from the twenty-second day of March 1783 to the said_____or bearer, _____Doll.

Jno Pierce, Commissioner

plicitly why the troops had not been paid previous to their furloughing "agreeably to the intention of Congress," and what measures Morris expected to employ in order to redeem the notes issued and to be issued to the army.[105] This time Morris's reply took the form of a long and detailed recapitulation of his relationship with Congress on the problem of army pay since the ninth of April. The resume was, in its way, an admirable answer because for the most part Morris let the facts speak for themselves. Like a piddling lawyer he could not, however, let pass the opportunity to assert that the actual payment of the troops was the job of the Paymaster General while Morris's responsibility was limited to the financial arrangements necessary to make the note issue. But once that petty point had been made, Morris climbed on to interesting ground for his retrospective account of the army pay problem. The plan of three months pay as advocated by Washington had first been officially broached to him, said Morris, by a congressional committee in early April. Yet weeks went by and Congress had not ordered him to take action. Then on 15 May Morris had told a committee of Congress that the contemplated note issue was impossible until governmental expenditures were drastically cut. Therefore, said the Financier, it was not until 26 May when Congress resolved to discharge the 'War-Men' that he could take action on the note issue. Nine short days later,

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105. JCC,24:432, 11 July 1783.

Morris proudly pointed out, he was delivering $25,000 worth of notes each day to the Paymaster-General. In six days he had signed 6,000 notes "besides the other Business of my office." With lordly sarcasm, he claimed that he could justifiably be held liable for slowness only in the matter of signing the notes--"upon that Subject I shall say nothing." As for the methods by which he planned to redeem the issue, Morris turned the question back upon Congress. That body, said Morris, had promised to do everything in its ability to gather the necessary funds, therefore "I rely on the firm Support of Congress...to redeem those Notes issued to the Army as well as to fulfill all the other Engagements which I have taken or may take on the public account."[106]

Morris told the truth in his own inimitable and disagreeable fashion. Congress could check and recheck the sequence of events only to agree that Morris was not obliged to begin work on the note issue until 26 May. That was the record. Congress had obviously failed in the welter of considerations to check on the state of the army pay before ordering the troops discharged. Congress had committed a grave oversight. But had not Morris been morally remiss in not calling the attention of Congress to that contretemps? That was the belief of many in Congress. Nor is it difficult for an unbiased observer to see in that tragedy of errors the congenital willfulness of Morris operating with

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106. Morris to Congress, 18 July 1783, JCC, 24:447-451.

that blithe indifference to results as long as his own hands were technically clean. It was that same perverted sense of virtue that earlier let Morris write about his inopportune decision to announce publicly his resignation in these words, "I do not hold myself answerable for consequences. Those are to be attributed to the opposers of just measures..."[107] There was nothing Congress could do except to reprove Morris. He should, the committee report, maintained, have informed Congress of the "difficulty or impractability" of accomplishing the payment in due time for Congress had pledged its faith to the army. If a timely notice had been given, the furloughing could have been suspended briefly until the three months' payment had been made. Thereby "in all probability the subsequent tumults and discontents in the Army might have been avoided."[108] And with that futile reproof to the dominant figure in the American government, the story of the disbanding of the major part of the army closes. The Congressional probings threw little light on a subject that must all too much be written in terms of incompetence, fear, and pettiness.

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107. To Greene, 12 March 1783, Oberholtzer, R. Morris, 197.

108. JCC, 24:520-21, 25 August 1783.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARMY AND THE STATES

To the American Army

> Welcome! thrice welcome, to a rescu'd land,
> Your Country's boast! the patriotic band!
> Whose gen'rous minds no dangers could appal,
> When rouz'd by freedom's animating call.
> Unnumber'd toils, and countless hazards past,
> Glorious restor'd to civil life at last![1]

The common soldier returning home could rest assured that at worst he would quickly become lost in the great civilian mass. Possibly in some cases the adjustment was too rapid: the debt due him, both moral and financial, was quickly forgotten. But most states kept faith with their privates and non-commissioned officers.

As a class it was the army officers who had good cause to suspect the warmth of the welcome that would be extended by the home-folks. For the officers had been promised a large bonus, the commutation of the half-pay, which early estimates placed at about $5,000,000 in addition to which an annual interest charge of $300,000 further hobbled the nation.[2] The Northern officers in camp had accepted the commutation with alacrity.[3] Nor had it taken long for those retired officers who were eligible for the commutation to

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1. Pennsylvania Packet, 20 September 1783.

2. JCC, 24:286, April 1783.

3. To Secretary at War, 30 April 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:368.

get together and express their preference for the commutation.[4] By the last day of October the officers of every line and independent corps north of North Carolina had signified their acceptance of the commutation.[5]

The officers had also jeopardized their welcome when they had permitted their financial demands to be identified with and used in the forwarding of the new financial measure resolved on by Congress 18 April 1783. A major part of that act, it will be recalled, was the establishment of a 5% impost to run for 25 years and to be directed by agents of the Federal government.[6] When that act was dispatched to the thirteen states it was accompanied by a thorough defense of its terms assembled by James Madison and entitled officially the "Address to the States, By the United States in Congress Assembled."[7] The Address admitted that the Act marked a moderate departure from the constitution, a departure necessitated by the need for swift and punctual action on the federal debt. Admittedly the debt was large

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4. See, e. g. the advertisement in the Salem Gazette, 22 May 1783, summoning the deranged officers of the Massachusetts line to a June meeting in Boston in order to vote on the commutation and to elect agents to pick up the certificates at Philadelphia. The sad experience of one of the Connecticut agents will be recounted later in this chapter.

5. JCC, 25:786.

6. Ibid., 24:257-262.

7. Ibid., 24:277-283.

but "It is sufficient that the debt has been fairly contracted and that justice and good faith demand that it should be fully discharged." To whom was this large debt owed? The Address ticked them off one by one: France, individual foreigners, fellow-Americans, and above all, "that illustrious and patriotic band of fellow-citizens" who had defended American liberty in the field. Appended to the Address was a collection of letters designed to convince the reader of the merit and justice of the creditors' claims. The documents chosen to illustrate the worth of the army were the officers' Memorial, the Anonymous Addresses, and the proceedings of the officers's meeting at Newburgh on 15 March. The rejection of the Anonymous Addresses was hailed in the letter of transmittal as "a fresh and lively instance of their (the army's) superiority to every seduction from the paths of virtue and glory." The Address was passed by Congress without opposition and with the express recommendation that the state legislatures not then in session be assembled "with all possible expedition" to act on the financial program.[8]

That indefatigable work-horse of the nationalist element, General Washington, resolved to place his name and logic behind the nationalist drive. The result was an all-out call for a strong United States supported by what Washington chose to call the four great "pillars": an

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8. JCC, 25:963. President of Congress to the States, 9 May 1783, LMCC, 7:160-161.

indissoluble union, a "sacred regard" for public justice, an adequate peace-time army, and a dissipation of local prejudices.[9] In this famed circular letter, composed on what he thought was the eve of his retirement to civil life, Washington particularly supported the justice of the army officers' claims upon the government. If the new financial program was not accepted, he foresaw national bankruptcy "before any different Plan can possibly be proposed and adopted." To bolster his arguments in behalf of the officer class he inclosed a batch of papers relevant to half-pay and commutation which, when printed, made a tidy pamphlet in themselves.[10] Once and for all, said Washington, the idea that such a benefit constituted a pension "ought to be exploded forever" since it was solely a part of the hire of the army, "it was the price of their blood and of your Independency, it can never be considered as a Pension or gratuity nor be cancelled until it is fairly discharged." Giving ear to the complaint that there was too great a difference in the rewards given to the officer and soldier,

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9. Writings of Washington, 26:483-96. The letter being long and copies having to be made by hand, the dates on the various copies range from 8 June to the last days of that month.

10. This pamphlet was first printed by Samuel Loudon, a New York printer who early in the war had gone up the Hudson to continue his publishing at Fishhill on the rim of the army encampment. All through the war he continued to put out his newspaper, The New York Packet, thereby affording an inspired organ for the officer class.

Washington maintained that distinction to be both necessary and useful, and also a satisfactory measurement of their respective contributions. That did not mean, he insisted, that he, deprecated any additional compensation to the soldier; it simply meant that no argument whatsoever had any validity in his mind if it either premised or "proved" the justice of reductions in the sums due the officers. Much more is worthy of comment in that letter of Washington's, for it preached a code of public morality and political precepts capable of extension to the measurement of all America's great problems. Extolling as it did the need for keeping solemn faith with the pledged word, the letter was apropos of the loyalist problems, of paper money issues, and of many other current matters. Here it is alone necessary to emphasize the backing that Washington gave to the impost and to the full payment of the army debt.

The new impost and the centralizing tendencies which that act exemplified were anathemas to many Americans in 1783, but the officers were mounted on that horse and that horse they would have to ride. Actually it made little difference in the South. There seems to have been no antagonism of financial origins in South Carolina. Directly to the north in the sister state few if any objected to the commutation.[11] A number of officers in North Carolina re-

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11. Hume, Washington's Correspondence Concerning the Cincinnati, 196.

ceived government jobs during the months following the close of the war as an expression of public gratitude.[12] In Virginia vehement passions were poured out on the pressing problems of the day, but none was directed at the officers. The party in ascendence was in excited opposition to the Federal impost. It had been strong enough to kill the old impost in 1782 and it was resolved that no measure of similar nature should again be resurrected. When first the news came to Virginia of the angry disposition of the main army, some opponents of the federal impost showed signs of becoming reconciled to an independent fund for Congress.[13] But neither the logic of the army's distress, nor the impassioned demands of the venerable Washington, nor the personal appearance of the Secretary of War before the state assembly could seriously shake the conviction of the majority that a federal impost would place too much power in the hand that held the sword.[14] Yet there was no anger shown toward the army officers. The assembly which spurned the federal impost took liberal action to aid both soldier and officer.[15] The men who were the life of the anti-impost

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12. Griffith J. McRee, Life and Correspondence of James Iredell, (2 vols., New York, 1857-58), 2:138n.

13. Edm. Randolph to Madison, 26 April 1783, LMCC, 7:158n.

14. N. Pendleton to Greene, 17 July 1783, Greene Papers (Clements Library).

15. Ibid.

party were socially conservative. They had no wish to stir the pot of class conflict. They wanted the treaty terms strictly complied with; they wanted no shutting down of courts; they wanted no issues of paper money, no delay in collecting past taxes; they wanted the army to receive its promised rewards. They were satisfied with the war and its results, and they would not tolerate "encroachments of the American Congress upon the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the separate states."[16] About the historical ingredients of Virginia particularism there is no need in this paper for extended comment. Outstanding factors were the attitudes of such leaders as Arthur and Richard Henry Lee with their deep-seated distrust of Robert Morris.[17] One fact only needs iteration here and that was the complete lack of animosity

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16. "Instructions of their Constituents to the Representatives for the County of Fairfax," 30 May 1783, Providence Gazette, 2 August 1783. The author of these instructions was probably George Mason.

17. It seems almost unnecessary to support this well known fact about the Lees. In Arthur's correspondence are to be found numerous explicit remarks about the "machinations" of Robert Morris, Robert Livingston, the French Minister, and a host of satellites whom he saw swarming around that "iniquitous" city of Philadelphia. Richard Henry Lee's writings put forward a constitutional and moral rationale for the particularists of Virginia. Specifically for his views in the summer of 1783 see the latter's letters in James Curtis Ballagh, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee (2 vols., New York, 1911-1914), 2:281-83, 283-85.

in Virginia toward the army officer. The anti-impost party sharply separated the officer from the federal impost. The officers were to be paid, but they were to be paid from funds constitutionally established and obtained. Thus the Virginians gave the lie to the nationalists' argument that financial justice was inseparable from a federal impost.

In Pennsylvania, too, the returning army officer met a friendly welcome. Although a nationalist like General St. Clair never failed to express concern and dubeity over the attitudes likely to dominate in the Pennsylvania Assembly, one easily perceives the blatant propaganda qualities of his arguments. Since he was trying to sell the commutation to his fellow officers and along with it the whole nationalist program of a stronger central government and of an alliance with the public creditors, it was only natural that he should place under a cloud of suspicion the future willingness of the Pennsylvania people to succor the officer.[18] Actually that commonwealth was pre-eminent for its active friendliness to the officer class. One of the grandest social functions of the summer season of 1783 in Philadelphia was an "elegant entertainment" given by the citizenry to the army officers whose troops had been dispatched from the Hudson at the time of the petty mutiny in the capitol city. As the toasts were drunk by citizen

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18. St. Clair Papers, 1:580, 582-83, 583-84.

and officer, the conviviality of spirits revealed a strong base of mutually sympathetic sentiments. "New strength to the Union, and new honor to its friends." "May our love of Liberty be shown in the virtuous use of it, and in the just rewards of those who have gained it for us." "May honor and honesty ever triumph over meanness and ingratitude." Three huzzas rose from the assembled dirt-farmers at the toast "May all our Soldiers be citizens, and our citizens soldiers; and may the plough be as prosperous as the sword has been successful." But it was the final toast, the Voluntary, that brought forth the loudest and longest cheers of the day, "Honor and Immortality to the Principles of Freedom and Virtue, in General Washington's circular letter."[19] These expressions of amiability bespoke specifically the hearts of the well-to-do Philadelphians, but a more meaningful echo was heard in the state assembly where it was resolved not only to adopt the Commutation Resolve of Congress but further to provide adequate sums "for the purpose of insuring the commutation."[20]

It was not until November of 1783 that the populous southern part of New York was at last free to join with the up-state counties to form once more a united state. Political lines were being drawn more clearly as the war days

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19. Pennsylvania Packet, 22 July 1783. Salem Gazette, 21 August 1783.

20. Pennsylvania Archives, Series I, 10:179-81.

receded into the past, and Clinton was heading a party increasingly sympathetic to the wants of the small-farmer. He and his party were moving rather slowly toward a philosophy of government, if the inchoate wishes, promises, and hopes of such an opportunist administration could fairly be considered a "philosophy," that was not friendly to an over-strong federal government. Nationalists like Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris recognized the trend and feared it. Particularism in New York as everywhere else meant opposition to the federal impost; and the small farmer backing of the Clinton party might well have meant in addition, as it did in New England, an outspoken antagonism to the army officers and the commutation. But New York like the other states was but a few years removed from the status of a semi-autonomous colony and had its own peculiar roots. In New York the Governor was a former general of the army, a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, indeed president of the state chapter. The agrarian party was mostly a glitterless collection of nonentities, but Colonel Lamb was not of the feeblest magnitude and he too was a member of the Cincinnati.[21] Therefore, when Clinton addressed the New York legislature in January 1784 he spoke warmly, though in general terms, of "every measure" which tended to cement the union and gave "energy to our national councils." To the legislators he recommended close and friendly

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21. Isaac A. Leake, Memoir of the Life and Times of General John Lamb (Albany, 1850), 356.

consideration of that currently famous document, Washington's circular letter to the states. Among the objects singled out for special approbation was the army. As was the custom, the Senate dutifully replied that the financial liabilities under which the men of the army labored would receive the legislature's special attention.[22] It is an ingrained American habit to discount severely the utterances of political "servants". Presumably, therefore, the sentiments of Clinton and his confreres might well be dismissed as mere oral exercises were it not for facts such as this: a considerable number of Connecticut officers contemplated staying in New York after the war because of that state's friendly disposition. It was said that some of the "leading men" in New York state were making offers of land on advantageous terms to Connecticut officers who would forego the unpleasant experience of a return to the East.[23] One of the highest compliments paid to the serenity of New York was the reaction of General McDougall when he discovered that anti-commutation sentiments were popular in a small section of the state tucked up close to the Connecticut border and settled by Connecticut immigrants. To the General's mind that abominable spirit was like nothing so much as a physical disease that spread to whatever the New

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22. Almon, Remembrancer, 17 Part I (1784):234-38, 261-64.

23. Jed. Huntington to Andrew Huntington, 3 September 1783, Huntington Papers (CHS) 20:465-66.

England people touched.[24] He was right, New England was burning with an anti-officer fever.

Opposition to the half-pay was an old story in New England, going back to the first proposals on that subject made in Congress.[25] As with almost every question there were two sides and people ready to support each. In Massachusetts the rift over half-pay and its subsequent commutation was clear cut geographically, the rural hinterland against the commercial seacoast.[26] The split was of long standing, going far back into colonial days, and it was sure to make itself evident whenever certain economic measures were brought before the General Court. On modes and rates of taxation as well as paper money there was inevitable conflict. In New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut this divergence between town and country was equally real but not so apparent nor susceptible to neat geographic classification. In Connecticut, for example, the western hill towns steadfastly followed where the country flag led, but along the Connecticut valley where small but bustling towns sheltered a fast-growing commercial class there were many who on occasion sympathized with the country party.

The anti-commutation, anti-officer movement being

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24. McDougall to Wyllys, 27 July 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:23.

25. See above, p.3.

26. Joseph Pierce to Knox, 7 October 1783, Knox Papers (MHS) 15:10. Also see above.

only one reflection of the total situation in New England during 1783, it is necessary to pay attention to certain contiguous matters. One meets immediately a general cry for economy in government, both state and federal. Town after twon instructed their representatives to slash salaries and cut excess employees off the public pay rolls. It was a demand natural enough at the end of a war, and it was particularly fitting for the rural areas to raise the cry. Much less than the commercial centers had they benefited from the economic boom that the Revolution had brought in its wake. It was a good bet too that the post-wary years would not bring riches to the farmers scrabbling a living from the poor New England soil. A heavy debt load and continual harrassment in the law courts found inevitable corrolaries in the demands of the rural voter on his legislature.[27] The demand for economy, however, was widespread, the seaccast towns being almost as insistent as their country cousins. As Sam Adams put it, "The war is over now, and the people turn their eyes to the disposition of their money..."[28] Unless Congress showed an honest intention to guard the public treasury closely Adams expressed himself as

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27. Scarcely any record of a town-meeting or any town instruction in the rural areas fails to echo such an instruction as this one of Medway: "We earnestly Recommend to you the greatest Economy and frugality with regard to the Expenditure of Publick monies..." E. O. Jameson, The History of Medway, Mass., 1713 to 1865 (Millis, Mass., 1886), 62.

28. S. Adams to E. Gerry, 9 September 1783, James T. Austin, The Life of Elbridge Gerry (Boston, 1828), 409.

fearful that Congress would lose the confidence of the country.[29]

The obverse of the coin of governmental economy was lower direct taxes. One obvious way to reduce the immediate strain on the taxpayer's pocket in 1783 was to make full use of imposts and excises. There were few occupational groups opposed to impost duties as a form of taxation. For the farmer it was a painless method of shifting the heavy tax burden onto the shoulders of the sea coast folk who were undoubtedly the largest purchasers of imported goods. Naturally there were merchants in the seaport towns who were opposed to impost duties because of possible adverse effects on mercantile business. Nevertheless a large part of the business community seem to have been willing to accept the impost since well-to-do merchants were often large holders of both the state and federal debt and creditors everywhere reckoned imposts to be the most favorable means of funding public debts. In every New England state there was a strong sentiment for the establishment of impost duties. Logically the people of Massachusetts and Rhode Island where foreign trade was large were inclined to support a state impost rather than one laid and collected directly by the federal government. To them the federal impost was

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29. Of course, part of this stricture was born of Adam's fear and dislike of Robert Morris. Nevertheless his insistence on economy had a wider popular basis.

an inequitable mode of taxation benefiting the non-commercial states. The inhabitants of New Hampshire and Connecticut, states which by and large fell into the non-commercial category, followed the same logic and for exactly the same reasons were inclined to support a federal impost.[30]

If certain vagrant cross-winds had not been blowing, this simple logical picture of New England attitudes toward the federal impost would suffice as history. However, within the new social and economic aristocracy that had entrenched itself in the Massachusetts government after the departure of the loyalists there were important differences of opinion. Holding as they did a share of the United States' debt second in size only to Pennsylvania's, coastal Massachusetts should have evidenced overwhelming affection for the federal impost.[31] That was not the case. Many New England businessmen shared the parochial distrust of their section for the "ungodly" peoples to the south. They chose to remain big fishes in the little pool rather than trust themselves to the currents of swifter waters. They wanted regional autonomy and they would not subscribe to any plan

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30. E. g. Wm. Whipple to R. H. Lee, 15 September 1783, in Richard H. Lee, Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee and His Correspondence (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1825), 2:113-114; and the Connecticut Delegates to Governor Trumbull, 2 September 1783, in LMCC, 7:284.

31. Bancroft, Formation of Constitution, 1:81.

likely to amalgamate them with the rest of the union. Specifically, this group was plagued by the fear that the federal impost would permit the octopus arms of Robert Morris to gather to himself over-whelming economic and political power.[32] If Morris had not had what this group considered a stranglehold on the federal government, these Massachusetts conservatives might not have been so particularistic in their judgments.[33] Certainly there was much merit in the criticism they levelled at Congress's persistent efforts to make the national credit stand or fall with the impost. "Finances," reasoned the Reverend Gordon, "must be raised not as a Financier may in theory think right, but as the people concerned in the payment of them may be readily induced to contribute."[34] Higginson asked angrily if Congress were not actually hazarding the

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32. The anti-Morris attitude stemmed from the Revolutionary experiences of the Adams and Higginson group, but their suspicions had some popularity. The historically-minded Reverend William Gordon, who made his home in the Boston area wrote, "Bob Morris, it is thought by many has been entrusted by Congress with greater powers than Ld. North possessed, which is not pleasing to many of the Patriots." "Gordon Letters", (MHS) Proceedings, 63:483.

33. At least that is what Higginson maintained in May 1783 shortly after the new impost act had been passed by Congress. Higginson to S. Adams, 20 May 1783, LMCC, 7:166.

34. MHS Proceedings, 63:483.

public peace and safety by urging the impost against all hope of success. It must result, he thought, in the public creditors eventually becoming aroused as they watched a prolonged and futile struggle over the impost while receiving no substantial provision to secure their debts.[35] Obviously men cut like merchant Stephen Higginson were not opposed to punctual and faithful payment of either state or federal debt. Their whole training and outlook on every day economics predicated the faithful discharge of every lawful contract. They were resolved, however, to hold the destinies of Massachusetts firmly in local hands. In the town of Roxbury which lay only a few miles from Boston, for example, the inhabitants voted in favor of a proposal designed to keep the current cash of the state from being drained off so that they might not be "reduced to difficulties through the operations of the continental treasury."[36] But no matter how antagonistic to the extension

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35. Higginson to T. Parson, Sr., 7 (?) April 1783, LMCC, 7:124. Those in opposition to the federal impost felt strongly that the national debt could be paid off from these sources: sale of western lands, state imposts, state excises, and "common taxation." David Howell to Governor W. Greene of Rhode Island, 24 December 1783, LMCC, 7:397.

36. "Instructions of Town of Roxbury," 19 May 1783, Pa. Packet, 10 June 1783. This plan called for the state to establish an office in Boston and to appoint an officer to run it. This office was to receive the money appropriated by the state for the service of the continent and to pay the continental debts due within the state. A clause in the proposal makes it appear that the people of Roxbury were willing to see the commutation paid to the officers. The reticent General Heath was a resident of this town.

of federal controls these people might have been, they were not antagonistic to the army officer nor to his commutation of half-pay, that was a legitimate debt and had to be paid.

The main opposition to the federal impost in New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts during 1783-1784 came from those elements which did not want the commutation paid to the officers. Who were the men that battled the officers? There is surprisingly little evidence that the discharged common soldier fought the commutation. Yet it was almost a logical necessity that such an antagonism would flame among a homogeneous people enjoying the large measure of social democracy that eighteenth century New England certainly did. The demand for half-pay which had been raised by the Connecticut soldiers just before the disbandment in June re-echoed at home. The merchant brother of one Connecticut officer was "amazed at the Cursed Spirit of levelism" demonstrated by the returning veterans.[37] Occasionally at a town meeting where the anti-commutation forces prevailed, this "unjust, odious and partial distinction between the officer and the private" was cited as an argument against the commutation.[38] Just how important

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37. J. Webb to S. B. Webb, 9 May 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:14.

38. "Resolves of a town meeting in Amenia precinct," 4 July 1783, Salem Gazette, 14 August 1783. This was an area in New York state settled largely by Connecticut people.

the voice of the ex-private was in home-town affairs it is impossible to say. A good guess would be that it was not great. America's civilian army was not the collection of vagabonds, thieves and rummies that some contemporary European professional armies were; nevertheless the great mass of privates, especially in the latter years of the war, must have come from the poorer, less important families in the community. It was much more likely that the anti-commutation movement in most towns and villages was led by men of considerable social standing. Even a cursory glance through the rosters of the numberless committees spawned in the town meetings and county conventions by the anti-commutation spirit reveals a large number of colonels, majors, and captains, as well as a few esquires. The military titles were mostly earned in the not-too-arduous and limited service of the New England militia companies. One can be sure that many of the higher militia officers held their positions because they were men of some importance and wealth in the village. Once that point has been made, one must turn around and admit that those who came to the defense of the continental officers were

invariably of the "better classes."[39]

Whatever roots the anti-commutation movement had in class antagonisms, the rationale advanced by its leaders was generously broad. In Farmington the town meeting expressed itself as "convinced the measure is unjust, impolitic, oppressive to the people, subversive to the principles of a republican government, and exceedingly dangerous when drawn into precedent..."[40] More particularly those agitating against the commutation charged that the army officers had been fairly treated. Their regular pay was held to be a just reward for their services. To stress their desire for justice, most anti-commutationists resolved "that the officers ought to have a full just adequate

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39. The multiplicity of military titles occasionally makes it difficult to know the exact significance of certain events. In 1782, for example, in the town of Southington, Connecticut, a struggle over social preeminence was fought out on a battle-field that would surprise only those who know little of colonial New England--the meeting house. The best seats in the meeting house had for a long time been distributed on the bases of age and property, but in 1782 the claim was put forward that military titles were another factor worthy of consideration. After much discussion, the claim was disallowed. Whether the intruders were of the line or the militia is not known. If the former, it would indicate that, in the town of Southington at least, the army officers were viewed by the town leaders as an upstart class seeking to challenge the established orderings of the local society. If the importunate knock came from the militia officers, it would suggest that they were not of the town elite, but significant enough to feel able to attempt an entrance into the town's upper strata. Reverend Heman R. Timlow, Ecclesiastical and other Sketches of Southington, Connecticut (Hartford, 1875), 181-82.

40. Salem Gazette, 21 August 1783. The meeting was held 4 August 1783.

and honourable Sattisfaction for the Time they in fact Served...and no Longer."[41] They wanted the officers to get every single penny of regular pay due, including the very substantial pay arrears.[42] It was not uncommonly charged that Congress had been coerced into offering the half-pay when the officers took advantage of the darkest hours of the war to threaten mass resignations. They acted, said the Farmington town meeting, "upon a fixed and deliberate system of making their fortunes, whatever distresses it might occasion to the people."[43] The people of Farmington did not blame Congress excessively because they felt that Congress had believed the critical circumstances of the day warranted the half-pay measures. Decidedly, however, the anti-commutation towns did believe that Congress had acted unconstitutionally. The people of Canton, Massachusetts "humbly" conceived that neither half-pay nor the commutation

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41. Barber, Simsbury, Conn., 324.

42. The people of Acton, Massachusetts said, "We are ready chearfully to exert ourselves to reward those who have promoted the public good. None deserve more highly than our brave army; none shall have our money more freely, so far as it is justly due; and if there has been any failure on the part of government, in fulfilling their contracts, let the injury and all their just demands be made up to them, as soon as may be: But to pension them we cannot consent; the principles of the American revolution, principles so universally admired forbid it." (Boston) Independent Chronicle, 12 June 1783.

43. Salem Gazette, 21 August 1783.

was "in the power of Congress to grant, being conspicuously incongruous with the general welfare of the United States!"[44] The philosophers of the anti-commutation movement seldom ventured farther along this argument than the momentum of their rhetoric would easily carry them. When they did, it was almost always to argue that the power of Congress to raise and grant money had to be limited "by a reasonable construction". That is to say, that Congress while the proper judge of its own powers was inferior to the collective body of the people who held "an original, underived and incommunicable authority and supremacy." The people, then, constituted the highest court and the anti-commutationists were sure that the people opposed the commutation.[45]

The half-pay was a pension, and the commutation of it was also a pension, and any attempt to deny that fact was considered errant sophisty by the anti-commutationists. Being pensions, those measures were doubly branded unconstitutional. The grant of "Exorbitant and unreasonable Pensions" was widely asserted to have been an important cause of the Revolution. Snatches of war-time shibboleths were often woven into the denunciation of pensions: "For a free people, just rising out of a threatening slavery,

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44. Daniel T. V. Huntoon, History of the Town of Canton (Mass.) (Cambridge, Mass., 1893), 425.

45. Salem Gazette, 21 August 1783.

into free shining prospects of a most glorious peace and independence, now to be taxed without their consent to support and maintain a large number of gentlemen as pensioners, in a time of universal peace, is, in our view, unconstitutional and directly in opposition to the sentiment of the states at large..."[46] Calling pension grants "unconstitutional" has the ring of exorbitant criticisms but it contained a cramped sort of accuracy. In the very summer of 1783 the people of New Hampshire had adopted a new state constitution of sterling republican qualities in whose bill of rights was this clause: "Economy being a most essential virtue in all States, especially in the young ones; no pension shall be granted, but in consideration of actual services, and such pensions ought to be granted with great caution by the legislature, and never for more than one year at a time."[47] It was this spirit of governmental simplicity that prompted the conservative Reverend Gordon to express the hope to Washington that the army officers would be rewarded not only in accordance with the financial ability of the people but also "consistent with the republican principles of the

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46. Frances Manwaring Caulkins, History of Norwich, Connecticut (Hartford, 1866), 399. Some asserted that that a pension to the officers would likely make "so many idle drones in the state hive...(and) lay a foundation to enslave this free people." Salem Gazette, 14 August 1783.

47. State Papers of New Hampshire, 20:14.

country."[48] Still another avenue of attack was to charge the commutation act with being poorly drawn and most inequitable. By the terms of that act an officer who had joined the army late in the war, even after the fighting days were over, received an identical amount with one of the same rank who had campaigned unceasingly since the first volley of the war. Many anti-commutationist legislators in the state governments seem to have based their opposition mainly on this last argument.[49]

The state governments in New England were not slow to reflect the popular uproar. Governor William Greene indicated in May his hope that Rhode Island's delegates in Congress would press for repeal of the commutation resolve. Messers Collins and Arnold would have been only too glad to have initiated such a move but seeing no possibility of immediate success they felt it wiser to bide their time.[50] The Massachusetts delegates, Holten and Higginson, were soon informed by friends from home that their votes for commutation were heartily disliked by many of their constituents. When

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48. MHS Proceedings, 63:485.

49. Joseph Pierce to Knox, 31 July 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 13:127. Pierce was reporting on the situation in Massachusetts.

50. Rhode Island delegates to Gov. Greene, 28 May 1783, LMCC, 7:174. At that moment, only the Rhode Island and New Jersey delegations would have supported repeal. The Massachusetts delegation was pro-commutation, the old Connecticut delegation was still sitting, and New Hampshire had no delegation in Philadelphia.

a letter requesting the yeas and nays on the commutation arrived in May from the Massachusetts' executive, it was apparent that punitive action was on foot. Both delegates stood their ground. They pointed out that the half-pay had been necessary in 1780, as witnessed by the unimpeachable authority of Washington. The commutation was, therefore, only a modification of an old act; and in every way the commutation should have been more acceptable to the nation than the original measure. In terms of actual money, the delegates pointed out, commutation would save the public up to two-fifths of what the half-pay would have cost. The officers, therefore, were actually getting considerably less by the revised statute than they were originally entitled to by the older resolves. Higginson waxed particularly bitter toward his dissatisfied compatriots. If the legislature were intending to punish the delegation, the whole delegation would have to be spanked; and he for one would be very happy to leave public life--indeed, he told Sam Adams that he might inform the General Court that he, Higginson, would not even consider serving another term as congressional delegate.[51] In expressing that wish Higginson was only anticipating a certainty.

The Massachusetts General Court sitting in July was vigorously anti-commutation and forthwith refused to re-

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51. Holten to S. Adams, 14 May 1783; Higginson to S. Adams, 20 May 1783, LMCC, 7:164, 166-69.

appoint the incumbent delegation. Most members of Congress saw in that action a simple rebuff by the legislature.[52] But in the eyes of at least one member of the small anti-nationalist bloc in Congress, that action of the General Court appeared sinister.[53] He perceived the hand of the French minister at work behind the scenes. By implication the Robert Morris clique was also involved. Admittedly Morris and his friends had little reason to wish the continued presence of Higginson and Holten in Congress, for Higginson had been the fiercest of all opponents to the nationalists' funding program and Holten was one of those whom David Howell of Rhode Island described as "good men and honest republicans, and with us in all measures."[54] To believe, however, that the French Minister was responsible for the act of the Massachusetts General Court was to suggest a superfluous causal factor. The country party's animosity toward the commutation was a sufficient explanation in itself.

Even greater consternation was aroused in Congress by a letter dated 11 July from the General Court of Massachusetts.[55] Acknowledging the receipt of the Congressional

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52. E. g. Madison to Randolph, 21 July 1783, ibid., 230.

53. A member of Congress to_____(probable author, Arthur Lee), 21 July 1783, ibid., 230.

54. Howell to Gov. Greene, 9 September 1783, ibid., 293.

55. JCC, 25:607-609.

Address, the letter proclaimed an ardent wish "to furnish those supplies which justice demands". Unfortunately the half-pay and the "proposed" commutation thereof had aroused great uneasiness in the state and that uneasiness in turn was embarrassing the legislature. To be sure the army must receive full justice but "at the same time", continued the letter, "it is most sincerely wished that they may return to the bosom of their country, under such circumstances, as may place them in the most agreeable light with their fellow-citizens." The commutation made that impossible for it represented "a grant of more than an adequate reward for their services and inconsistent with that equality which ought to subsist among citizens of free and republican states. Such a measure appears calculated to raise and exalt some citizens in wealth and grandeur, to the injury and oppression of others..." In addition, said the letter, the people of Massachusetts were anxious to see a sizeable reduction in the civil list effected. Then taking Congress's arm in a firm but genteel grip, the General Court gave it a nasty twist as it explained that because of the commutation the federal impost could not be granted at the present session even though the need for speedy adoption was appreciated if the public credit were to be restored and the union saved. The impost would again be considered at the next session, concluded the letter. The implication was obvious enough, but the authors of the letter could not forego a clearer statement of the proposed

bargain: "From these observations you may easily learn the difficult and critical situation the Legislature is in, and they rely on the wisdom of Congress to adopt and propose some measures for relief in this extremity." Congress would either have to slash the federal budget and wipe the half-pay and commutation resolves off the book or abandon all hope for the funding program. If the penurious spirit of that letter was indulged, prophesied Madison, it would be "fatal to every establishment that requires expense."[56]

As if they had not yet caused the majority in Congress sufficient heartbreak, the Massachusetts legislators instructed their delegates in Congress to press for legislation that could not but further weaken the already enfeebled hand of the federal government.[57] The General Court was apparently intent on proving to the soldiers of the Massachusetts line that the state government was anxious to forward the army's interest. The General Court doubtless also wished to take into its own hands as far as possible the debts incurred in the name of Congress and owing to the soldiers of the Massachusetts line. The Massachusetts delegates were therefore instructed to move that the

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56. Madison to Randolph, 12 August 1783, LMCC, 7:259.

57. I have been unable to locate a copy of these instructions which were sent off in the last part of June. However the gist of the instructions is apparent from the activities of Higginson in Congress and his official letter to the President of the Massachusetts Senate, Sam Adams, 31 July 1783, ibid., 243-44.

Receiver of continental taxes in Massachusetts be ordered to pay to the discharged officers and soldiers of the Massachusetts line one year's pay out of the money he received from Massachusetts on the congressional requisition of 1782.[58] In other words, instead of Massachusetts paying into the federal treasury her full proportion of the federal requisition, she would withdraw immediately sufficient funds to give her soldiers one year's pay. Congress would therewith be by-passed and the intent of Congress to be responsible for all the pay due the continental line since August of 1780 would be thwarted. Yet this action of Massachusetts was not unique. Indeed, the Bay State by asking congressional permission was showing more solicitude for Congress than certain other states. Maryland, usually thought of as a good friend of Congress, had but a few weeks earlier gone ahead on her own hook, taking five months pay for her line out of the funds earmarked for the federal government.[59]

Congress would not countenance such unilateral action as Massachusetts contemplated. Still, that New

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58. JCC, 24:428-29.

59. Ibid., 421n, 454-55. For the disapproving views of certain Marylanders like Daniel Carroll and James McHenry, see LMCC, 7:153, 249. McHenry was in an embarrassing position since he had vigorously opposed the Maryland act when he sat in the state legislature and then had to defend the same act a few weeks later by virtue of his new position as a Maryland delegate to Congress.

England state was an exceedingly important one in the Union, and some substitute measure or measures had to be put forward in place of her reprobated request. There was adequate material at hand. A growing and widespread clamor was being raised in July that Robert Morris and his financial agents in the states were speculating on a large scale in the notes that had been issued from the Superintendent's office. Many soldiers were joining in the wail, claiming that their notes were depreciating rapidly.[60] The extent of Morris's guilt, if any, is difficult to establish. Certainly the soldier had all through the war been a particular object of interest for speculators of all types. So bad had the situation become in the Hudson encampment just prior to the mass-furloughing in June that Washington had openly warned his soldiers against enriching the speculators who, he said, "must hereafter obtain the full payment of their nominal value."[61] Morris denied that he ever speculated in the army notes, either directly or indirectly.[62] Perhaps that was the truth. Nevertheless it seems clear that the Financier had not always acted above-board with the great majority of those who held his notes. At some time in the

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60. R. Morris to the Paymaster-General, 12 August 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:644.

61. General Orders, 21 May 1783, Writings of Washington, 26:446-47.

62. R. Morris to Governors of the States, 28 July 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:611.

past he had informed the Receivers of continental funds that when they had hard money in hand they might accept all notes signed by him both in payment of taxes and in outright redemption. Apparently this information had never penetrated beyond the knowledge of a small group.[63] Morris insisted that his instructions were generally known "to all those who are concerned in the business they relate to."[64] In effect it meant that most original holders of the securities knew of only one way to realize immediate cash on their paper: selling to brokers at a tremendous discount. On the other hand, some of the purchasers of securities knew that they could redeem the purchased paper for near face value at the continental Receivers. After some debate Congress ordered Morris to publish his instructions to the Receivers so that the soldiers and the other original creditors of the federal government might stand on a more equal footing with the prospective buyers of their securities. Congress tied that resolution to another ordering the Financier to complete the same payments to the officers and soldiers of the Massachusetts line as had been ordered paid to the army at large.[65] Thus the instructions of the General Court had lost

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63. Va. Delegates to Gov. Harrison, 1 August 1783, LMCC, 7:246.

64. R. Morris to Congress, 15 July 1783, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:550.

65. JCC, 24:430-32, 477-79, 480-82.

out, but Higginson hoped that "our meritorious soldiers will reap some advantages" from the last two congressional resolves, "by not only preventing their rates from depreciating, but in a short time of assuring them money."[66]

The pointed refusal of the Massachusetts General Court to take action on the congressional funding program brought some army officers to take aggressive steps to combat the anti-commutation movement. Earlier in their public pronouncements at the time of the great disbandment in June, the top officers had uniformly urged on the homeward-bound veterans a determination to resume civilian life without complaint even though the general public might view them with hostile eyes. And with an assurance that they doubtless did not feel the generals expressed a belief that eventually the public would pay the soldier and officer in full.[67] The obvious drift toward defeat of the officers' hopes led McDougall to take the initiative. He had been so long engaged in presenting the officers' case before Congress that he was, he said, resolved to keep up the fight. To Knox, who had himself been sending to his Boston friends numerous letters and pamphlets sympathetic to the officers'

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66. Mass. Delegates to President of Mass. Senate, 31 July 1783, LMCC, 7:243-44.

67. General orders of Howe and Greene 8 and 22 June, Pennsylvania Packet, 22 July 1783 and Salem Gazette, 18 September 1783.

cause,[68] McDougall proposed that an alert and tightly knit network of correspondents and friendly printers be established reaching from New Hampshire to New Jersey. Their job would be to insure the publication in their own states of every article favorable to the commutation and the federal funding program. The public in the Eastern states, said McDougall, must be informed of the justice of the officers' cause. Only such a program of education could win federal funds. If in the last resort the officers were forced to fall back on the bounty of their own states, that education would in any case not have been in vain. The nearby friendly voice of the army in Fishkill, Mr. Loudon's New York Packet, had published several good articles and more would be coming off that press, promised the General. "If we fail in ultimately obtaining Justice," McDougall wrote to Colonel Wyllys in Hartford, "it will be our own faults, for certain I am, we have the sensible and honest part of America with us."[69]

When Mr. Loudon departed with his printing press for New York City in August, McDougall decided that the importance of the propaganda campaign overrode strict Whig

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68. See for example a letter from Joseph Pierce to Knox, 31 July 1783, Knox Papers (MHS) 13:127, acknowledging receipt of letters and pamphlets for distribution.

69. McDougall to Knox, 25 July 1783, Knox Papers (MHS) 13:110. McDougall to Wyllys, 27 July 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:23-24.

ethics. In complete secrecy he asked the Loyalist printer, Gaines, to print 13,000 copies of Washington's circular letter for distribution in pamphlet form. When approaching Gaines with the proposition, McDougall did not forget to point out that the qualities of public faith and mercy on which Washington had placed great stress in his letter would necessarily rebound to the advantage of the Loyalists as well as of the officers. Whether Gaines accepted the job is not known and of minor importance. The incident has been detailed here only because it shows the intensity of McDougall's desire to pursue his "educational program."[70] Similarly, when McDougall toted up the expenses of the officer delegation in Philadelphia and found that a surplus of over one hundred dollars remained, he was anxious to use that money to finance more publications.[71] Spending the

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70. McDougall to Knox and Huntington, 14 September 1783, Knox Papers (MHS) 14:68. Another interesting aspect of this affair is the relationship of the officers to the Loyalists. There is evidence that many officers of New England and Middle States background were sympathetic to the plight of the Loyalists but this writer is not sure just what the significance of that fact may be nor what the bases of the tie-up may have been. Obviously some officers, and their families, had been friendly with Loyalist families before the war. There is evidence to suggest that the Southern picture differed considerably from that in the North.

71. Presumably the officer delegation had received not only the contributions of their fellow officers, but also money from Congress. For in May Congress had ordered Robert Morris to pay the delegates for "their reasonable expenses during their stay in town until the commutation...was agreed to by Congress." JCC, 24:339.

money that way, he urged, was a much better investment than the purchase of diplomas and medals for the Society of the Cincinnati. Those were the only two feasible ways of spending that sum of money which belonged to the officers collectively. Whatever arguments were raised in opposition to the suggestion, the money seems in the end to have been spent on paraphernalia for the Cincinnati.[72]

Whoever was responsible for the publicity campaign waged against the anti-commutation movement, and there is no reason to doubt that McDougall's lead was of great importance, the campaigners got more than an equitable share of space in the newspapers. Where the anti-commutationists seldom had an article printed supporting their position, the defenders of the officers received liberal treatment except in an occasional news sheet such as the Providence Gazette.

In the considerable flood of material that was released it is easy to see the direction of argument taken by the pro-commutation writers. Two final goals were aimed at because they were deemed the pillars of commutation. Above all else the people and their representatives had to be convinced that there was no reason to fear the federal government, and therefore the acts of Congress should be

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72. McDougall to Knox and Huntington, 14 September 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 14:68. Statement by McDougall, Knox, and Huntington, 15 October 1783, Alex. McDougall Papers (NYHS).

fulfilled. The federal government, said the publicists, being one "of laws and not of men," Congress had to work within the framework of the powers delegated by the Confederation.[73] The other great aim was to sell the federal impost, with the argument frequently slanted at the farmer for the impost would go easy on him while placing the burden on the buyer of imported luxuries. Occasionally the anti-commutationists would be challenged to produce a better mode of paying the debt--"this has not been done or attempted."[74]

The immediate task that the defenders of the commutation set for themselves was not, however, to rhapsodize unstintingly about Congress and the impost, but rather to attack vigorously on the subject of the commutation itself. Of the officers' attitude some defenders claimed that the officers would gladly forego their claims to commutation if they were assured that they would speedily be paid all their pay arrearages in hard cash. Since the accumulation of so much specie was out of the question, the officers had to insist on the supplementary aid provided by the commutation pay.[75] What of the argument that the people were too poor

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73. Letter by PUBLICOLA, Salem Gazette, 28 August 1783. This was one of the letters by PUBLICOLA which McDougall was so anxious to distribute as a pamphlet.

74. Ibid.

75. "An Address to the discontented people of America", signed HONORIUS (Boston) Independent Chronicle, 9 October 1783.

to bear the enormous burden of the commutation? "This is an idle fear," said PUBLICOLA, and proceeded to demonstrate that the tax necessary to handle all governmental debts, both federal and state, would not be "one fourth of the sum that hath been levied in some of the late years, and collected faithfully." Nor did Americans have the right as a nation to hide behind the cloak of poverty, he scolded, for theirs was a land of limitless horizons encompassing unbounded tracts, her population would continue to grow rapidly, and her commerce to expand to every portion of the globe.[76] And what of the cry that there was a scarcity of money, asked HONORIUS? A simple remedy was at hand: the huge amount of public securities presently drowning the market could be transformed into healthy transferable paper by the simple process of establishing funds with which to pay interest on the public debt.[77] Knowing that the New England small farmer was the foundation of the anti-commutation movement, at least one scribbler jumped into a haystack and emerged with a thick rural dialect talking about the "Mutation." In this second life it seems as how he's an old man from the county of Middlesex who's worked hard for a living all his days "but though poor, thank God, I endeavour to be honest." 'Course at first he was dead set against the "Mutation" and

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76. Salem Gazette, 28 August 1783.

77. (Boston) Independent Chronicle, 9 October 1783.

he'd told his Representative so. But one day he went up into the gallery of the State House and heard the whole gol-dang General Court discuss the "Mutation". Besides finding out that that damn thing was actually known as the "Commutation" he also discovered that the Massachusetts General Court had approved of the half-pay back in 1781. Then rose one who said that the half-pay only amounted to a shilling poll-tax "after all the combustion" and here he'd "always heard among the neighbors that 'twas half a million, hard cash." Well that earful sure left him up in the air: "I am quite in a puzzle: and I begin to fear us folks in the country towns are all in the dark about Mutation."[78]

Of necessity the pro-commutation articles could not afford to indict the whole population. So, as in the case of FARMER, they assumed that the mass of the people had been deluded by a few trouble-makers who were envious, black-hearted rascals bent on evil schemes of anarchy. The sins of immorality and bad faith were constantly whipped, sometimes sarcastically, sometimes by Biblical metaphor. A TRUE MASSACHUSETTENSIAN introduced himself by saying, "I have lived long enough to know that money is the main thing, that sincerity and good faith sometimes subject us to great cost and inconvenience; and therefore I am highly pleased with the pious design said to be in agitation, of with-

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78. Letter signed FARMER, Salem Gazette, 6 November 1783. This letter was printed in several other New England papers.

holding the half-pay unwarily promised to our officers in the days of our trouble." All of which reminded him of a fable in verse about a cat who, when about to drown in a vat of ale, was pulled to safety by several rats but only after Tabby had promised to "never worry rats again". As soon as she was safe the cat sprang upon the spokesman for the rats and with these words angrily swept aside the rats' reminder of her promise:

> "How now, ye vagrants! do ye think,
> I'll keep a promise mad in drink."[79]

JOHANNES IN EREMO threatened America with the fate of the Gibeonites who had broken a covenant with the Israelites. "Pray," he asked, "which is the most likely way for a nation to get out of debt?--whether by that righteousness which exalts the nation, by preserving inviolate their national faith?--or by that sin of breaking national faith, which is a reproach to any people? It is certain, there is that which giveth, and yet increaseth;--and there is that which with holdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty. God loves the cheerful giver, whether person or nation..."[80]

To what extent the course of the anti-commutation movement was influenced by the give-and-take in the newspapers can never be determined. There is no doubt, however, that the day-to-day sequence of political events

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79. Salem Gazette, 10 July 1783.

80. Salem Gazette, 21 August 1783.

contains material adequate to satisfy the historian in search of causes and effects. In Connecticut, the direction of the state government had been retained by the old colonial ruling class. Nothing can better typify the unbroken continuity than the career of Connecticut's elderly and efficient governor, Jonathan Trumbull, who served as the state's executive from the beginning to the end of the war. Overwhelmingly the old governing class in Connecticut was sympathetic to the officers, to the commutation, and to the federal impost. Many Connecticut officers belonged to the old ruling class families. Two most prominent examples will have to stand for a host of lesser cases. A son of Governor Trumbull was a valued member of General Washington's military "family". The Huntington name was carried not only by Connecticut's highest ranking officer but also by two of the state's delegates in Congress, as well as prominent merchants in the Norwich area. The ruling clique was brought close to open defeat by the commutation controversy. Delighted as they were to print and distribute copies of Washington's circular letter and the Address from Congress with its numerous inclosures, so threatening had the black storm of protest become that the Governor and his Council of Safety decided not to call the Assembly into special session to take action on the impost as Congress had urgently requested. Excuses were put forward in July that all the reprints were not yet ready and that the Governor did not yet know what the other states were doing

on the matter.[81] Behind the procrastination lay the desire to avoid as long as possible a head-on meeting with the anti-commutation forces. That unhappy clash was bound to come at the regular session of the Assembly in October for the lower house was already friendly to the anti-commutation movement.

Troubled Connecticut would not, however, contain itself until the October session. At the end of July, Captain William Judd returned to his home in Farmington to face an outraged public opinion. During the past half-year he had spent considerable time in Philadelphia as a lobbyist and agent for other Connecticut officers who like himself had been involuntarily retired during the course of the war by the periodic reorganizations of the army. Those officers, known technically as "deranged" officers, had the same problems as the other officers: their accounts had not been settled by the end of the war and they were eligible for the commutation. It was to pick up the public securities due the deranged officers that Judd had made his most recent trip to Philadelphia. Sunday afternoon of the week he returned, crowds of townspeople came together for the purpose, Judd believed, of assaulting him and taking away the securities he had in his possession. Without waiting to face the expected assemblage, Judd fled from

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81. Leonard Woods Labaree, ed., The Public Records of the State of Connecticut, 5:197-98, 198-99.

town to a safe haven. The next evening the town met and "unanimously approved" a committee report on Captain Judd which expressed disapproval of his activities "in terms of highest resentment". The meeting was "decidedly of (the) opinion that his...conduct tends to the subversion of the rights of the people, and merits the severest reprehensions of this town and the public."[82]

The widespread notoriety of the Judd affair makes it seem probable that threats of violence were really quite rare. Far and away the most serious challenges to the officer and his commutation were the spate of town meetings held in Connecticut during the summer of 1783. The rash of meetings was a state-wide phenomenon. Not only did people gather to denounce the commutation in the small western hill towns such as Canaan and Winsted, but also in the old populous valley towns of Farmington, Wethersfield, Simsbury, and even Hartford. Down along the coast their counterparts were to be found at Southington, New London, and other port towns.[83] One very unfriendly spectator of the situation

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82. Letter of Judd to the Printers, Salem Gazette, 28 August 1783. Minutes of town meeting of Farmington, 4 August, ibid., 21 August 1783. The titles of the committee men selected to present the meeting's disapproval to Judd show the broad composition of the anti-commutation movement: John Treadwell, Esq; Mr. Hezekiah Wadsworth, Col. Gad Stanly, Col. Isaac Lee, Maj. Ichabod Norton, Capt. John Allyn and Lieut. Joseph Byington.

83. Isaac William Stuart, Life of Jonathan Trumbull, Sen. (Boston, 1859), 597.

at Wethersfield near Hartford spoke in these words, "Meeting after meeting has been held here, Committees appointed with very extraordinary powers and authorities. Business conducted in Town-Meeting by passion prejudice without light, reason or common sense, or common decency; all clamor hubbub noise and confusion."[84] The committees referred to were committees of correspondence, an instrument resurrected at this time to coordinate the activities of towns throughout the state. Especially were they necessary to transform the discontents into positive political action such as might be formulated by county and state conventions.

The focus of activity was the grand convention to be held at Middletown the third of September. The delegates selected to go to Middletown went with the mission "to advise and adopt such Measures as they shall judge most Expedient and Effectual to Counteract and oppose said Commutation."[85] Specifically it was felt by the delegates of many towns that great blame belonged to the state assembly because it had taken no action at its previous May session to counteract the commutation. Should not the Assembly, therefore, appoint a committee to examine the journals of Congress "and approve or disapprove, applaud or censure the conduct of the (Connecticut) delegates?"[86] Many thought

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84. Col. J. Chester to Lt. Col. Huntington, 22 September 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:247.

85. Barber, Simsbury, 326-27.

86. Ibid.

that such steps would raise a bar to any subsequent attempts of Congress to usurp unauthorized powers. It would also, perhaps deter congressional delegates like Eliphalet Dyer and Oliver Wolcott from acting contrary to the wishes of the state. Some towns probably sent their convention delegates off to Middletown with the intention that they should be sympathetic to the provision of adequate funds for the national debt while at the same time refusing explicitly to permit those funds to be used in servicing the commutation. If that be done, said the Farmington people with a touch of malicious humor, it "would render the securities granted to the officers of the army, in virtue of...(the commutation) resolution of Congress, of a value exactly proportional to the services for which they are given; and under those circumstances we are content they should hold them in possession, as a perpetual evidence of their folly, in attempting to invade the rights of a people determined to be free."[87]

When the delegates convened at Middletown on September third, twenty-eight Connecticut towns were represented, a not inconsiderable number. Nevertheless, the convention averred that notification of the meeting had been too short to permit many towns to be represented and therefore decided that a true concensus on proper action against the commutation was at that time impossible. So the convention adjourned until the last day of September.

87. Caulkins, Norwich, 399; Salem Gazette, 21 Aug. 1783.

But before adopting the disbanding motion, the delegates went on record with certain recommendations capable of adoption by the towns. It was suggested that the state assemblymen be instructed to inaugurate at their October session a survey of congressional powers and their exercise to date. If the legislature should find that Congress had acted unconstitutionally in the matter of commutation, then the legislature should adopt the most effectual constitutional measures to relieve Connecticut of that burden. Let the assemblymen also know, voted the convention, that the people feel that they have not been kept properly informed and that they therefore wish to have the yeas and nays published on all important matters handled by the assembly.[88] Most important of all, the representatives from some counties worked out a list of candidates for the assembly seats who were to receive the united support of the anti-commutation forces in the mid-September elections.[89]

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88. "Extract of the proceedings at the Middletown Convention of 3 September 1783, "Salem Gazette, 11 September 1783.

89. No mention of the agreement is made in the above cited Extract of convention proceedings. However, among the pro-officer group it was believed that control of the legislature was the chief object of the convention. One correspondent said flatly, "The great object in the Convention was to change upper and lower house, for this purpose a Nomination was prepared which in this Town (Wethersfield) and Hartford had very little influence." Col. Chester to Lt. Col. Huntington, 22 September 1783, Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:247.

If the senate could be captured and the narrow control in the lower house strengthened, the opposition would have virtual control over the political destinies of the state.

The Connecticut kettle seemed ready to boil over. Not only were the friends of Congress in New England exceedingly perturbed, Congress itself looked fearfully to the north. Men like Madison had heard that the East was on the verge of "general anarchy". The outlook for the funding program, since it was tied to the commutation, was black indeed.[90] So oppressive loomed the future that some supporters of the officers in New England were at last prepared to suggest to the officers that they seek a compromise. HONORIUS, claiming to have no connection with the army, addressed himself to the officers. After a fitting introduction in which he expressed his deepest sympathy for the maligned officers and testified highly to the justice of their cause, he asked them to reconsider. People "are growing turbulent and ungovernable--laws are disregarded--civil officers are insulted and the constitution tottering to the foundation...Connecticut is in more danger now, than when General Howe landed upon Long Island with 30,000 men." "You officers", he said, "who have sacrificed so much in the arduous conflict may possibly save us once more from destruction. What sacrifice it would be necessary to make--

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90. Madison to Randolph, 8 September 1783, and Madison to E. Pendleton, 8 September 1783, LMCC, 7:290-1, 291.

or what claims to relinquish, is a matter of too much delicacy for me to suggest. You may do much--you can do all that is necessary to save us from ruin." If you do not, "this I am certain of, Connecticut will be a poor, contemptible state--without credit--without reputation--without law--torn with factions--distracted in her councils--like Carthage of old, too jealous of power, she will banish her supporters and defenders--and finally fall a prey to her own intrigues or the ambition of her neighbours."[91] At that same moment in Congress, the Massachusetts delegates were insisting that the Eastern states be permitted to work out a compromise with their officers. Unless Congress gave way, they warned, the Eastern states would use their constitutional check on the federal government: they would withhold their "grants". As time passed the threats gave way to entreaties. The Massachusetts delegates announced themselves ready to give ground if a compromise were authorized by Congress. They were willing that those individual officers who would not accept a compromise with their state should remain the creditors of Congress. Even that concession did not move Congress, the bid failed.[92] Nor would the Connecticut officers bow to the storm. Perhaps they had so emotionally involved themselves that they did not

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91. Salem Gazette, 18 September 1783.

92. Mass. Delegates to a Committee of the Mass. Assy., 11 September and 1 October 1783, LMCC, 7:294-97, 316-17.

believe their hnnor would permit them to retreat. Perhaps they had become convinced that they might as well live or die under the congressional banner fearing the aroused state would never pay them anything, not even back pay.[93] It was out of the question for the Connecticut officers to respond collectively and authoritatively to the compromise suggestion, but their leader, General Huntington, in private brusquely dismissed the idea as "impossible". Congress, he said flatly, "must find Means to discharge the debt." He believed that the leaders of the anti-commutation movement were using the upheavel to mask their real aim of expunging all debts. Rather than treat with such, the General would put his trust in the simple prayer that "a kind Providence may overrule their evil Machinations for the firmer Establishment of our Government."[94]

In the end it was not the pro-commutation party that cracked. After the Middletown convention many a social conservative who had hitherto cleaved to the anti-commutation cause came seriously to question the wisdom of his alignment. He might not have liked the idea of helping to pay the burden of the commutation, and he might have thought that many undeserving officers were virtually stealing the public money; but assuredly he did not like the color of

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93. Madison to Randolph, 18 August 1783, ibid., 269.

94. J. Huntington to A. Huntington, 19 September 1783, Huntington Papers (CHS) 20:466-67.

mob action such as had threatened at Farmington. And most of all he was suspicious of extra-legal devices like the convention for he was fearful of political control going over into the hands of a grass-roots class, unused to the reins of government and likely to run to excesses. In short, the conservative faction in the anti-commutation movement had to choose between winning the one battle of commutation or the whole war of class leadership. These men could be touched by appeals to good government and wise finances; they appreciated the argument that constant bickering was frightening money and securities over the state line into New York. They were substantial taxpayers, they were used to handling money. They could understand that the draining off of paper would eventually mean that Connecticut would have to pay her federal quota in hard cahs.[95] And so what we of the twentieth century would call the right-wing of the anti-commutation movement began to reason thus of their bete-noire: "we cannot get rid of it, and if we could, such measures as have been pursued would not effect it and if they could they are unjustifiable and endanger the constitution." Perhaps the number who reasoned thus was not large but the shift was apparent and in the September elections the pro-commutation group at least retained their hold on the senate although they saw their

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95. Letter by HONORIUS, (Boston) Independent Chronicle, 9 October 1783.

opponents assume clear control of the lower house.[96]

The Connecticut General Assembly which convened in October was sharply split. The senate wished to pass a federal impost, and the house of representatives wanted to pen a remonstrance to Congress against the commutation.[97] The latter move seems to have been the most important result of the session of the Middletown convention which had reconvened on 30 September.[98] In the name of the lower house, the Speaker sent the remonstrance to Congress on the first of November. The reasoning in the letter was occasionally tortured but the final intention was clear. Congress was, of course, reprimanded for exceeding its constitutional powers in the enactment of the half-pay and commutation resolves. But the Connecticut legislators were not satisfied to let their opposition stand on one leg. So they proceeded to tell the present Congress that the Congress which sat in 1781 could have enacted the half-pay for only one conceivable and legitimate reason, namely, to compensate the officers for the loss in real money resulting from the depreciation of currency. And since, the letter continued, the state of Connecticut had compensated its men for the

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96. Ford, S. B. Webb, 3:248.

97. Salem Gazette, 30 October 1783.

98. Pennsylvania Packet, 18 November 1783.

depreciation not only until August, 1780 as Congress has directed but even to December 1781, Connecticut believed that any money contemplated being granted to the officers should be right belong to the state. Therefore, despite its wish to honor Congress's requisition, "it seems impracticable to execute any means for raising its Quota of the public Debt as stated." Like the earlier letter from Massachusetts, this one concluded with the prayer that Congress would remove all the causes of complaint.[99] Really the letter was more of a gesture or a defy. The lower house spoke truest by refusing to act on the federal impost.

The most noteworthy event of the October session was the resignation of their seats in Congress by Connecticut's four delegates, Oliver Wolcott, Samuel Huntington, Richard Law, and Oliver Ellsworth, and the decision of Jonathan Trumbull not to serve as governor after his present term expired the following May.[100] What lay behind the departure of those men cannot be stated with complete certainty. Very likely there was a direct tie-up with the strength of the anti-commutation party in the assembly.[101] Perhaps the delegates were eased out; perhaps all five decided their actions would serve as a signal protest capable of restor-

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99. Not possessing a copy of this letter, I have deduced its terms from a contemplated answer of Congress, JCC, 26:265.

100. Salem Gazette, 30 October 1783.

101. See, e. g., the suggestive query in Pa. Packet, 2 Dec.

ing the political mind of Connecticut to an even keel. Whatever the motivation, Governor Trumbull took the opportunity of coupling his resignation announcement to the Assembly with a strong plea in favor of a stronger central government. With no further worries about his own political career the old Governor called upon his unsympathetic audience to "pay the strictest attention to all the sacred rules of justice and equity, by a faithful observance and fulfillment of all public as well as private engagements." His closing words made a peaceful valediction: "let each one study the good of his neighbour and of the community, as his own:--hate strifes, contentions, jealousies, envy, avarice, and every evil work, and ground yourselves in this faithful and sure axiom, that virtue exalteth a nation, but that sin and evil workings are the destruction of a people."[102]

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102. Salem Gazette, 4 December 1783.

CHAPTER V

THE DECLINE OF POPULAR ANTAGONISM

In Massachusetts events had followed a course during the late summer and autumn of 1783 that closely paralleled those in Connecticut. There had been the same squalling litter of town meetings; the same arguments for and against commutation had been rehearsed again and again. Occasionally an especially defiant town had recklessly gone on record with a refusal to pay "any Continental, State or County taxes" until Congress should rescind their grant of the commutation.[1] Probably every community was split in varying proportions over the great issue of the day. But, whereas in Connecticut the majority of towns in all sections of the state had at the beginning given their support to the anti-commutation movement, in Massachusetts there was a clear geographical split. The wealthier towns along the narrow seacoast strip unfalteringly befriended the commutation while the opposition came from the inland rural areas. The clearcut physical division may well have been the reason that the agitation in Massachusetts never attained such heights of bitterness as in the sister Puritan commonwealth.

When the Massachusetts General Court convened in the last week of September its first chore was to listen to

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1. Hiram Barrus, History of the Town of Goshen (Mass.) (Boston, 1881), 21.

the elegantly equivocal call to duty by Governor John Hancock. Every man who heeded could nod his head approvingly as the Governor extolled the Union as "our palladium" and expressed his assurances that the commonwealth of Massachusetts would always be ready to comply with the "reasonable requisitions" of Congress so that a final settlement might be reached "with so meritorious an army in a manner dictated by justice and honor."[2]

The legislators seated before the state executive all knew themselves to be good Americans, hones, upright, and just in every action and thought. The conflict came, of course, in the translation of the great moral virtue into somber political fact. There was the large ungainly rural group supposedly dead set against the commutation and for that reason unwilling to permit a federal impost. Those members composed a large majority in the House of Representatives.[3] The social conservatives, who represented commercial wealth as well as the "better people", were firmly in control of the Senate, however. Politically, the conservatives were not deeply anchored on the question

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2. Almon, Remembrancer, 17 part 1 (1784):152-54.

3. Joseph Pierce to Knox, 7 October 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 15:10. On the first vote anent commutation, 8 October, this group cast over 90 votes whereas the pro-commutation bloc in the lower house could muster only 26. According to Pierce, the 90-odd towns together paid less taxes than those represented by the small minority group.

of state autonomy versus a stronger central government. Two informed cliques were constantly trying to win control of the conservative vote. There was the nationalist element, perhaps built around the friends of Robert Morris. Much more powerful were those who looked to Sam Adams, Stephen Higginson, Samuel Osgood, and their friends for leadership. This latter group had sent most of Massachusetts' delegates to Congress, and they were the political leaders of the state. Their firm resolution, almost akin to a mania, that Massachusetts should not bolster Congress at the expense of her own power stemmed from a violent distrust of Rober Morris and his friends. Abetted by a majority of the Middle and Southern states delegates, the Morris coterie had built up what Higginson called "the Aristocratic Junto" in Congress. The Massachusetts men felt themselves to be part of a small but gallant minority whose great mission in the political arena was to block Robert Morris at every turn lest the Financier be able to erect the dread "System." The "System" seems to have been a synomym for an elaborate government controlled by Morris, staffed by men loyal to him, and supported by an intriguing French court. Consequently, when Higginson returned to Massachusetts from Congress, he was only too happy to appear before the state senate to warn that body of the dangerous tendencies of the "Aristocratic Junto" and, in particular, to damn the federal impost as recommend-

ed by Congress.[4] Of course that did not mean that Higginson was opposed to the commutation. He had been publicly slapped by his own state for not opposing that measure.[5] In his own mind he believed that the anti-commutation spirit in Massachusetts had actually been fostered by "Quacks" in order to achieve a political end, the ouster of Higginson from Congress. In October he wrote from Boston that those "Quacks" were then using "all their arts" to quiet the anti-commutation sentiment that they had aroused.[6] In other words, Higginson believed that the Morris crowd had manipulated the anti-commutation movement in order to kill Higginson politically so that they might more easily have their way in Congress. With that aim accomplished the Morris group had turned around and were trying to pacify the anti-commutationists so that the federal impost could be pushed through the Massachusetts legislature. The validity of this theory has never been proven nor disproven to the knowledge of this writer. Conceivably it may have been as Higginson insisted although the idea that a few nationalists of the Morris persuasion were able to turn the rather unmanageable anti-commutation group on and off like a faucet is hard to believe.

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4. Higginson to Bland, 6 October 1783, LMCC, 7:323.

5. See above, p. 184-185.

6. Higginson to Holten, 14 October 1783, LMCC, 7:335.

Higginson's initial efforts in the Massachusetts legislature met with grand success: an impost bill retaining nearly all control in state hands was rumbling along to almost certain passage.[7] Then suddenly the whole affair blew up. Governor Hancock put into the hands of the legislators extracts of two letters written by Massachusett's elder statesman, John Adams, and transmitted by Robert Morris.[8] So divorced from the petty politics of the day had Adams' long sojurn abroad rendered him that his fellow-citizens looked to his words as those of a great non-partisan statesman. Therefore, when Adams stressed in those letters the urgent need for the endowment of Congress with adequate funds so that America might survive as a just and powerful nation, the hopes of Higginson were abruptly dashed. Both senate and house swiftly adopted an impost act closely modelled after the recommendations

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7. LMCC, 7:323.

8. Morris to Governor of Mass., 20 September 1783, Charles Francis Adams, ed., The Works of John Adams (10 vols., Boston, 1850-56), 8:152. The letters of Adams from which the extracts were made were addressed to Robert Morris under dates of 10 and 11 July 1783. They may be found in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:531-32, 536-37. Higginson complained bitterly that it was unfair to present only extracts. However, the full letters contained nothing that would set at naught the arguments extracted by Morris. LMCC, 7:334.

of Congress.[9] So sharp had the turn been that many members even lost, at least temporarily, their anti-commutation fervor. When the attempt was made to attach a proviso that would have forbade the use of the money collected by the federal impost to pay off the commutation, it was defeated 64 to 74 in the lower house.[10]

At last it appeared as though the anti-officer sentiment had passed its peak, Massachusetts had called the turn; and though animosities would not be sweetened in a few short days, prospects for a more serene future seemed to open up. While Higginson was sniffing contemptously at the "Quacks" and predicting a unanimous approval of commutation at the next session of the General Court, Rufus Putnam was similarly discovering in his day-to-day meetings with the people of the Boston area that opposition was definitely abating. It was, he said, as though the commutation and half-pay had never been heard of. Naturally some ill-will still remained "especially among the lower class of people", but he was content.[11] So high had

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9. Higginson to A. Lee, October 1783, "Letters of Stephen Higginson, 1783-1804," AHA Annual Report, 1896 (vol. 1), 711. President of Congress to John Adams 1 November 1783, LMCC, 7:363. In the senate only two remained opposed to the congressional impost. Ibid., 7:334.

10. Pennsylvania Packet, 20 November 1783.

11. Putnam to Knox, 23 October 1783, Knox Papers (MHS), 15:96.

emotions burned, however, that the smouldering remains could be easily rekindled by a new batch of combustible materials.

During the last days of October the readers of several New England newspapers acquired their first knowledge of the existence and principles of the Society of the Cincinnati. Subscribers to the Providence Gazette and the Salem Gazette found their entire first pages given over to a reprint of the Institution.[12] The publication of that document was the harbinger of an exciting new pamphlet written by one, "Cassius", which leveled strong charges against the Cincinnati. Born in the print shops of Charleston, early in October, "Considerations on the Society of the Cincinnati" was quickly sped northward for extensive new printings.[13] In a few weeks the Cincinnati had become a chief topic of conversation throughout the length of the nation.

The author of the "Considerations" was Aedannus Burke, an irrascible, eccentric but competent judge of the South Carolina bench. His printed attack on the Cincinnati was the unique product of two factors, the rather

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12. Providence Gazette, 25 Oct. 1783. Salem Gazette, 30 October 1783.

13. The pamphlet was advertised for sale in Philadelphia at least as early as 4 November, in the Pa. Packet. First public mention of the pamphlet was an advertisement in the Gazette of the State of South Carolina announcing that the Considerations was "Now in Press." Edgar Erskine Hume, "Early Opposition to the Cincinnati", America, 30 (1936) :599.

peculiar personality of the author and the turbulent politics of South Carolina in 1783.[14] Perhaps more than any other state in the Union, South Carolina had been ripped and torn by the battles of the Revolution. Charleston had not been relinquished by the British until December 1782. The intestinal strife between conservative Whig and radical Whig and pacific Tories raged on through the whole year of 1783. The Tories and conservative Whigs seem to have banded together as soon as it was apparent that Britain could not retain a hold on the state. Both groups, naturally enough, wanted to see public order and quiet quickly restored. They wished to see the terms of the peace treaty fully complied with. They wanted, in other words, to get back to "business as usual" with the utmost speed. In opposition were the radical Whigs. They were bent on expelling or ostracizing many members of the

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14. Next to nothing is known about Burke. One of the few historians who has ever attempted to "explain" Burke's blast at the Cincinnati is E. E. Hume, author of numerous books and articles on the Society. Unfortunately Mr. Hume approaches the Society with such a filiopietistic bias that he accepts the unproven and slanderous reason given by a contemporary defender of the Society: that Burke had written his pamphlet out of pique and jealousy when he discovered that his own service in the army was insufficient to entitle him to membership. There may or may not have been some substance to the charge, although Burke himself vigorously denied it with a demonstrated willingness to settle the matter on the field of honor. What is most interesting and also most important is to note the neatness with which Burke's attack on the Cincinnati dovetails with his other expressions on the political and social world about him. Hume's comments on Burke are to be found in the article cited immediately above, p. 605.

Charleston community who had either been neutral or friendly to the British occupation. The influence of the radicals in the state government was originally considerable. Almost at the same time as the British evacuated Charleston, Governor Rutledge established by proclamation a severe test law. The conservative element in the population attacked it vigorously and with some success, for the drift of Carolina politics by the end of 1783, was toward the conservative position of wide amnesty and internal peace. The radicals remained, however, a potent and raucous voice. The organizational heart of the radicals seems to have been the Smoking Club, a name which was soon changed to the Marine Anti-Britannic Society. Its leading light was a certain Dr. Fallon whom General Greene described on the basis of first hand information as a Jesuit, disturber of the peace, and coward. Just how many of those epithets and others Fallon deserved is unknown, but there can be no doubt that he and his fellow-workers kept Charleston in constant turmoil for many a nervous month with dark threats and busy committees.[15]

Judge Burke had been an ardent and active supporter of the Revolution, having served in the field for more than two years. Like so many other Americans he saw the land of his making on a wonderful threshold of peace and expanding prosperity. He gloried in his country's origins, "con-

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15. N. Greene to Charles Pettit, 29 July 1783, Joseph Reed Papers (NYHS) 10.

stituted peaceably and deliberately by a social compact" in bright contrast to the treachery and violence which he believed to have been the foundations of the old European states. There was his America, three thousand miles apart from the cabals of the old world: a great challenge and a more wonderful opportunity. As a dispenser of the law, Burke could only watch with deep misgiving the persistent turbulence and illegal vagaries of the state. He denounced Governor Rutledge's test law as wholly unnecessary not only because the existing law was adequate but also because he feared to see any man, however admirable his character and deeds, assume unto himself great power. Supreme authority, said Burke, must ever be so intoxicating as to mislead even the good. "The aggrandisement of his family, and perpetuating power in it; or being at the head of an aristocracy, is of far greater consequence to an able, ambitious man than public freedom." Unless the people of South Carolina shed their lawless nature, abandoned private revenge, and place their fortunes and life unfalteringly in the hands of the established lawful instruments of the states, he foresaw calamity. For there are always men in a republic who "watch the troubling of the waters" with delight. Those men take advantage of faction and party, "and in the height of the confusion undermine and work through those batteries of law and constitution which we have been raising...to guard us against the enroachments of dangerous influence, or arbitrary power." They are "people of cunning

heads and cool tempers, who, without being in a passion themselves, would behold with pleasure, the people disgrace themselves by violent passions, violent measures, by disorder and licentiousness; nay, such would think it their interest to encourage it." It was "much for the honor of humanity", he said, that the men of the army were the first to forgive their former enemies "and share with them the blessings of peace and conciliation."[16]

When delivering himself of those sentiments, Burke was oftentimes saying much the same things as were being said by Sam Adams, Alexander Hamilton, John Dickinson and a host of other Americans in official life. On certain points he resembled only the suspicious New Englanders: his fear of an Aristocracy", and his suspicion that a competent group of men might ruthlessly reap a tragic harvest in the fields of discontent. But in one point Burke was singular: he first recognized the possibility that the Society of the Cincinnati might well be the feared reaper. He learned of the Society's organization and program one evening at "the Corner Club" where he was in the company of such distinguished revolutionary Charlestonians as General Moultrie and Commodore Gillon. Except for one other gentleman, according to Burke's later testimony, he was the first

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16. This synthesis of Burke's point of view in 1783 is drawn from several addresses and charges to grand juries in Almon, Remembrancer, 16 part II (1783): 163-87. South Carolina Gazette, 10 June and 16 December 1783.

to see that the Cincinnati constituted a graver danger to America than the Smoking Club even in its most radical aberrations.[17]

In his attack on the Cincinnati, Burke turned up every stone in the Society's Institution to reveal for the enlightment of the American people the swarming of poisonous bugs. As a call to arms, the pamphlet properly enough carried the inscription, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion", and concluded with the exclamation "How Blind Are the Multitude". He landed hard on Baron Steuben who had written to General Moultrie asking him to organize the South Carolina chapter. Said Cassius, "I have the honor to tell Baron Steuben, that though an order of peerage may do very well under the petty princes of Germany, yet in America it is incompatible with our freedom." With its exclusive membership and hereditary principle, with its medal and diploma, the Society was fair game for the charge that its members were seeking to establish an aristocracy of the military in a land dedicated to republican ideals of equality. The failure of the Society to seek the approval of the established governments laid it open to attack as an extra-legal institution. The Society's pledge to deliberate on the activities of the American government and to

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17. Letter of CASSIUS, addressed TO THE PUBLIC, reprinted in The Freeman's Journal, 23 June 1784, from the South Carolina Gazette, 13 May 1784.

strengthen the Union were interpreted to mean that the Society would oversee the workings of the civil government with the intention of arrogating to itself the real political power in the nation. That fear was naturally strengthened by the elaborate organization of a General Society, thirteen state societies, and an unknown number of district societies, all bound together by a system of correspondence. What could the provision for a limited number of honorary members mean but that the Society would attempt thereby to consolidate its political influence? And the Society's fund--would that not be the golden key to unlock the door to supreme power in the nation?[18]

At first the public reaction to Burke's attack was a compound of curiosity and mildness. There was no immediate reason for the army officers to bound fearfully for their holes. In several states local chapters were organized just before public interest in the Society was aroused. The South Carolina officers held their first meeting even as Burke's pamphlet was in the press. The Virginia society

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18. Burke's Considerations was by all odds the outstanding printed attack on the Cincinnati. It covered the ground with such adequacy that no one else whose pen might ordinarily have joined in the onslaught thought the effort necessary. In France, the Count de Mirabeau revised Burke's work, elaborating on those points where his European background would permit him to fill out the logic of Burke. For example, Mirabeau spun a theory showing how victorious military men laid the basis for European feudalism and aristocracy. Count de Mirabeau, Considerations on the Order of Cincinnatus (Philadelphia, 1786), 5-8.

also came into being early in October. There they elected as their president, Horatio Gates, who next to Washington was the highest ranking officer with residence in the Old Dominion.[19] During that same month the Pennsylvania society came into being and elected to the presidency and vice presidency, Generals St. Clair and Wayne, respectively. In addition four outstanding civilians were chosen as honorary members: John Dickinson, Robert Morris, Thomas McKean, and William Moore. The official capacities of those men suggest that there was some substance to Burke's conviction that honorary membership would be a device to aid the Cincinnati in gaining political influence.[20] The Maryland society delayed its organization until the last days of November, and then proceeded to elect General Smallwood to the presidency and to make Governor Paca an honorary member.[21] Both Governor Paca and John Dickinson were selected by their societies to attend the important general meeting of the national society the following May. In the two New England states of New Hampshire and Rhode Island

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19. Alvin T. Embrey, History of Fredericksburg, Virginia (Richmond, 1937), 144-45.

20. Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati (Philadelphia, 1785), 40-41. Pennsylvania Packet, 7 and 25 October 1783.

21. Seventy-Six Society, Publications: Maryland Papers (Philadelphia, 1857), 210-11. Almon, Remembrancer, 17 part 1 (1784) 171-76.

societies were organized shortly after Burke's pamphlet appeared. The formation of the New Hampshire branch had been balked in June of 1783 by the refusal of General Stark to interest himself in the matter. Consequently, General Sullivan who had early left the army was importuned by General Steuben, then acting as a sort of amanuensis for the Secretary-General of the national society, to take up the task of erecting a chapter in New Hampshire. Sullivan agreed, but there was little interest shown by his fellow officers. Only fourteen attended the first meeting in November at which Sullivan was elected president, with Colonel Dearborn as vice-president.[22] The following month a number of Rhode Island officers gathered in response to a notice in the Providence paper and elected the state's outstanding war hero, General Greene, president and the politician-soldier, General Varnum, vice president.[23]

Once again it was New England with her hyper-sensitive eyes that saw the supposed danger of the Cincinnati most clearly. They saw because they expected to see. Almost a year earlier Higginson and Samuel Osgood had observed at first hand in Philadelphia how a nationalist group had sought to yoke the public creditors and the army in a move to control the federal government. They had watched

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22. Records of the New Hampshire Society, 5, 14, 56.

23. Providence Gazette, 29 November and 27 December 1783.

with deep suspicion as Robert Morris and his friends demonstrated a love of the French which to the New Englanders smacked of the unpatriotic. At all times the Easterners sustained an unflagging suspicion of the other nine states of the Union where they believed "the aristocratical Influence" predominated.[24] Out of that morass of intrigue and unrepublican spirit the New Englanders fearfully looked for the worst to emerge. In December 1783 Osgood wrote from Congress that the party faithful to Morris was angry over its lack of success but that it would "persevere inflexibly in their Attempts for any Alteration, by Intrigue, and by open Force, when Matters are matured, and promise more Success, than at present."[25] The inflexible determination of Massachusett's political leaders to hobble Robert Morris led the General Court to recommend in December that the federal treasury be placed in commission.[26]

The departure of Morris might satisfy Higginson, but to Osgood permanent federal funds, no matter who or how many might make up the contemplated treasury board, were dangerous. For permanent funds, he feared, would necessarily bring an elaborate government in its train, and with it a standing army. Osgood's worst fears were strengthened by the conversation of several members of the Cincinnati

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24. Osgood to J. Adams, 14 December 1783, LMCC, 7:414.
25. Osgood to J. Adams, 7 December 1783, ibid., 380-81.
26. LMCC, 7:415.

who were serving as delegates in Congress. He had heard them say in effect that if the officers were paid then the Cincinnati would prove a harmless organization. If not--well, that possibility seems never to have been discussed. It was the old story, sighed Osgood, of the public creditors and officers working for permanent funds, which, once established, would "draw the attention of all the Cincinnati, of all the aristocracy, of all the unprincipled and subtle intriguers of America." Their power, he sadly concluded would be an over-match for the honest and independent: "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light."[27] Elbridge Gerry saw the Cincinnati participating in an even greater and more sinister drama. Back of it all was France and her American myrmidons. Foiled in all their nefarious schemes to win control of America's government by the republican character of the Articles of Confederation, the French party was aiming at nothing less than effecting a change in the constitution. Therefore the Society of the Cincinnati had been created as a "political Wolf" in sheep's clothing. The Cincinnati with its own assemblies and committees would soon attempt to supersede the civil institutions. Even if the Society were stripped of all funds, titles, and badges, their meetings would alone be sufficient to undo the nation. Palms enough

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27. Osgood to Higginson, 2 February 1784, ibid., 434.

would be crossed with silver to bring an overthrow of the constitution.[28] Every major cause of unrest on the continent was attributed by Higginson to the desire of the French to prevent a rapprochement between Britain and America: not only the ferment over the commutation and the organization of the Cincinnati but also the quarrel between New York and Vermont, and the opposition to the Loyalist refugees.[29]

The Cincinnati had raised up against the officers in Massachusetts a new and potent enemy, the political leaders of the conservative class, theretofore the defenders of the officers in the commutation controversy. It was not necessary for them to give credence to all the amazing lucubrations of men like Gerry; it was quite enough to see that a cohesive bloc of military heroes was planning to take an active interest in American government. With their war service the officers might gain a large following among the masses.[30] There lay the root of the fears evident in Sam

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28. Gerry to Higginson, 13 May 1784, ibid., 522-23.

29. Higginson to , April 1784, "Letters of Stephen Higginson" AHA Annual Report, 1896 (vol. 1) :715.

30. The illogical nature of this fear exposes a contrast between theory and reality. It was a foundation stone of the conservatives' political theory that the masses were not well-fitted to participate in government because their lack of education, property, and the like made them easy prey for demagogues and dictators. On the other hand, it was apparent that the first and most belligerent opposition to the officer clique had come from the "poorer sort."

Adams when he inveighed against "hereditary distinctions" and "Pride of Family."[31] It was more than his severe Puritan republicanism, although the factor was very real, that evoked his diatribes against the Cincinnati. It was that immediate, almost instinctive, reaction of the political leader to a sudden challenge from a potentially strong opponent. The initial responses of American politicos abroad like John Adams, John Jay, and Benjamin Franklin were similarly most unfavorable.[32]

The first reaction of the officer class to Burke's pamphlet was perhaps an amused one. Certainly that was the case with the good Baron Steuben. His short sojourn in the United States and his close association with Philadelphia and New York City conservatives combined to shut him off from any serious appreciation of American trends. When Steuben read the masterpiece of Cassius in which he had been made the chief villain merely because he had done some of the secretarial work that had rightfully been the chore of General Knox, the Baron was pleasantly titilated. It was a fine opportunity to chide the Massachusetts general

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31. S. Adams to Gerry, 19 April 1784, Harry Alonzo Cushing, The Writings of Samuel Adams (4 vols., New York and London, 1904-1908), 4:298-99.

32. Albert Henry Smythe, ed., The Writings of Benjamin Franklin (10 vols. New York, 1905-1907), 9:161. William Jay, The Life of John Jay (2 vols., New York, 1833), 2:146-48. Works of John Adams, 9:524. Richard Henry Lee, The Life of Arthur Lee, L.L.D. (2 vols., Boston, 1829), 2:250.

who was an equal mixture of the jolly and the pompous. The Baron jokingly accused Knox, the true father of the Cincinnati, of having used him as a cat's-paw to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. "But listen! I will prove to Cassius," said the Baron with mock seriousness, "that this dangerous plan had its birth in the brain of two Yankees," Knox and Huntington. Ah yes, continued the Baron, "We know very well these Bostonians and the people of the Holy Land, who beneath a Presbyterian and modest air conceal the most ambitious designs." Nor could the Baron refrain from spoofing about the coming marriage of Marquis Henry Knox to the Princess of Hyder Ali.[33] Assuredly Henry Knox could no more have appreciated the Baron's humor than he could have used an additional wife. As a man who had his eye fixed on a comfortable job in the government, Knox could ill-afford to get in the bad graces of the New England politicians. In addition Knox soon discovered that some officers were better prepared than he to abandon ship. Just before the state meeting of Cincinnati in February, General Heath was able to catch a bad cold and, incidentally, an adequate excuse for staying home by the fireside.[34] The latter was getting ready to run for the state senate and had no inclination to associate with the military pariahs. Anyway, Heath had

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33. Drake, Massachusetts Cincinnati, 19.

34. Ibid., 29.

early foretold the sad situation so he had some justification for placing himself on separate ground from his fellow officers. He so successfully disentangled himself from association with the Cincinnati that he was elected to the senate in April to the great disgust of Sam Adams and Higginson. To win, however, it had been necessary for Heath to spread the story that he was about to resign from the Cincinnati.[35] All of which would seem to indicate that the public was not antagonistic to individual officers, but only to officers as a collective idea.

The most drastic official action taken against the Cincinnati in Massachusetts was the appointment of a committee "to consider what measures are necessary to be taken in order to prevent the ill consequences of any combinations that are, or may hereafter be formed, to promote undue distinction among the citizens of this free State, and tending to establish a hereditary nobility, contrary to the federation of the United States, and the Spirit of the Constitution of this Com'th." It should be particularly noted that the conservative Senate originated this punitive commission, not the lower house where the anti-commutationists

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35. Wallace Evan Davies, "The Society of the Cincinnati in New England 1783-1800," The William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, 5(1948):13-14.

had their strength.[36] The committee report which was approved in March found the Cincinnati guilty of every major charge that had been lodged against it. The report was especially fearful that the Society aspired to become an *imperium in imperio* and that foreign influence would inevitably be introduced by the membership of the French officers. The report concluded that the Society was "unjustifiable" and a menace to civil government, but recommended that legislative action be postponed until the next session.[37] The report was never followed up, yet it manifested more interest in the Society than was evidenced by any other state legislature.

Conceivably the agitation over the Cincinnati displayed by Sam Adams and his political comrades would have been much less if it had not appeared as though Massachusetts politics were turning into a Donnybrook Fair. Of course the anti-commutation movement in Massachusetts had

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36. Wallace Evans Davies, "The Society of the Cincinnati in New England 1783-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 5(1948):12. Admittedly this writer has seen but a small fraction of the available sources on Massachusetts during this period, nevertheless it seems of interest to point out that of the materials examined, only one example was found of a town meeting expressing disapproval of the Cincinnati, that was at Cambridge, a town dominated by the conservative party. (Boston) *Independent Chronicle*, 3 June 1784. There is no reason at all to doubt the existence of strong popular antagonism on the issue of the Cincinnati. Nevertheless it appears that the indigent rural areas remained most interested in the commutation issue.

37. *Mass. Spy*, 1 April 1784. The General Court accepted the report 23 March.

been dealt a severe blow by the enactment of the federal impost, nevertheless the movement retained much vitality. The result was that the rural element was thwacking away at the officers and their conservative defenders on two counts, while the conservatives themselves were split over the Cincinnati and the federal impost. Under those conditions it was always possible though not likely that the old revolutionary conservative leadership might be jettisoned. In any case the constant turmoil made the conservatives a very uneasy lot. Many rural towns in Massachusetts refused to accept defeat on the commutation matter with good grace. Town after town during the winter of 1783-1784 rehashed the old arguments and instructed their representatives to work for repeal of the bonus as well as repeal, or at least modification, of the impost act.

Worst of all the manifestations that the continued agitation took was the rash of county conventions that broke out in the spring of 1784.[38] There were extra-legal organizations and for that reason constituted a threat of the same species as the Cincinnati to the conservative politicos. Sam Adams had ridden into power on just such vehicles, but naturally they looked out of place to him in 1783. "To say

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38. Conventions were held at Worcester in April, in Dedham the same month, and also in the counties adjacent to Cape Cod and the Rhode Island border. For a rather complete listing of the county conventions in Massachusetts during the period 1782-87 the reader is referred to Anson Ely Morse, The Federalist Party in Massachusetts...(Princeton, 1909) 206-207.

the least," he remarked, "they have become useless."[39] No longer the great panjandrum of Massachusetts politics, Adams had become a Slavish spokesman for the powerful Hancock party and its interest. He maintained that his native state had at last established regular and constitutional governments so that the people could no longer be "enslaved or materially injured." The decision of Governor Trumbull to retire from politics had evidently given Sam much to think about. He had been in opposition to the old colonial government for so long a time that he could not quickly divest himself of the old revolutionary attitudes and cliches. Over and over he had exhorted his fellow citizens to suspect the motives of their rulers and to forbid them independent power. Sam had taught the lesson well, but the Trumbull affair was an eye-opener. He discovered that though jealousy of power was a necessary political virtue there were men in the states who, "under the guise of watchful patriots" were finding fault with every public measure, "with a design to destroy that just confidence in government, which is necessary for the support of those liberties, which we have so dearly purchased."[40] And,

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39. S. Adams to Noah Webster, 30 April 1784, Writings, 4:304-306. Cf. ibid., 296, where Sam uses the same sort of arguments in reference to the Cincinnati.

40. S. Adams to J. Adams, 4 November 1783, Works of John Adams, 9:519-21.

essentially, that was the gist of the conservative attack on the county conventions. Some critics in commenting on those gatherings even had the temerity to recall a phrase of the late Bernard, 'direct oppugnation' to the government.[41]

Really the most forceful argument, however, against the continuance of the anti-commutation movement might be capsulized in the simple direct question, 'What can you do about the commutation?' All the time the controversy had been raging, the Superintendent of Finance, the Paymaster General, and the agents of the various regiments had continued to work away at the laborious job of settling accounts, filling out the final certificates, and forwarding them to their owners.[42] The payment of the commutation, was therefore, a fact. It was also true that a large number of the officers' certificates had already passed from the

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41. Letter signed WORCESTERIENSIS, Mass. Spy, 25 March 1784. Another letter that attacked the conventions on this ground was by S. K., ibid., 26 February 1784.

42. Notices were sometimes inserted in the newspapers by the regimental agents instructing the late officers and privates where they might pick up their certificates. E. G. see Massachusetts Spy, 4 March 1784, and Providence Gazette, 10 April 1784. It had been almost a year since the work of settling the accounts had begun and evidently there was much grumbling over the delay. One agent wishing to forestall as much sarcasm as possible closed his notice with these words, "The Subscriber thinks no Time or Place more proper than the present to suggest, that he had been no Way contributary to the many Difficulties which have impeded and protracted the Receipt of these Certificates."

hands of their original owners. It might even be true, as one contemporary writer said, that the certificates were already possessed by Frenchmen, Spaniards, Dutch and even Britishers. Moreover it was also a fact that the officers' securities were physically indistinguishable from other public securities that had been issued in 1783.[43]

It is easy enough to hang up arguments like carcasses on meat hooks, but much of the actual flavor and logic is thereby lost. In this case perhaps a brief recounting of the Suffolk county convention will be of value in understanding the decline of the commutation movement. The county of Suffolk included the great town of Boston but also had within its limits a considerable number of small rural towns. A majority of the latter continued to oppose the commutation far into 1784. In February the committees of Wrentham and Medway issued invitations to all the towns in the county to meet in convention at Dedham where measures would be discussed to fight the impost and commutation.[44] The Boston town meeting was dominated by conservatives and hence entirely unwilling to countenance such nonsense.[45]

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43. Mass. Spy, 25 March 1784, (Boston) Independent Chronicle, 27 May 1784.

44. Mass. Spy, 25 March 1784. This issue contains the letter to Boston, dated 6 February 1784.

45. Pennsylvania Packet, 25 March 1784.

Appropriately enough they chose as a committee to convey their distaste of the proposed convention the following men: Joseph Barrell who had waxed rich on war-time trade and more lately was purchasing heavily in public securities including final settlement certificates; William Tudor, a rising lawyer who had served in the army as Advocate-General; and a certain Captain Sarson Belcher.[46] In their letter announcing Boston's disfavor the composers deprecated the county convention as a "fruitless design of disturbing the tranquility of the State." It was the same reasoning that Sam Adams had advanced--"There was a time, when we were governed by foreign power, and a redress of grievances could be had in no other way; but thank Heaven that time is gone..." etc. Secondly, the Bostonians not only pointed out that the commutation had been paid and "so wisely blended with the national debt" but also maintained that the commutation actually amounted to but "a pittance." The final settlement certificates, said they had so little market value that the pay arrears plus the commutation amounted in hard cash to only about two-thirds of the nominal value of the pay arrears alone.[47]

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46. Records Commissioners Reports of the City of Boston, 31:3. Robert A. East, Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era (New York, 1938), 61, 66, 86, 270-71, 273, 231.

47. Massachusetts Spy, 25 March 1784. Roxbury answered the convention call in the same fashion as Boston. Ibid., 1 April 1784.

Despite Boston's defection, the convention was held and out of it came a scathing reply to the Bostonians. To the idea that county conventions had become an anachronism they replied that"...the same causes which makes (sic) county meetings necessary under a foreign government, will infallibly make them necessary under a domestic one." After considerable more of the same tenor, the letter took up the Bostonians' argument that the total cash value received by the officers would equal only about two-thirds of the pay arrears. That was manifestly impossible said the convention, for the pay arrears being a just debt the officers would be paid every farthing of it. But if the Boston people were perfectly serious about the matter, the letter continued, the rural towns would scrape together their share of the two-thirds, turn it over to Boston and let Boston satisfy the whole debt with the two-thirds. "We have no doubt the patriotism and wealth of your town will induce an immediate compliance."[48] Obviously the whole matter was gradually sinking under a mass of verbiage and taunts with the anti-commutationists destined to lose because the actualities of the situation had outsped their

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47. Massachusetts Spy, 25 March 1784. Roxbury, answered the convention call in the same fashion as Boston. Ibid., 1 April 1784.

48. Independent Chronicle, 20 May 1784.

arguments. Some Suffolk towns held grimly to their purpose and in a last grand but futile gesture petitioned Rhode Island to accept them into her jurisdiction.[49]

The decline of the commutation movement was also apparent in Connecticut. But the change of heart did not come over night in the state where commutation had roused the most violent of opposition. In December of 1783 that persistent phenomenon, the Middletown Convention, once more convened. This time only twenty towns were represented. Once again commutation and impost were given a vicious kicking about, and the activities of the state assembly were also closely revicwed. In addition the convention proclaimed Burke's pamphlet to be required reading for the whole state.[50] A general coordinating committee of correspondence was also established under the direction of Hugh Ledlie, the old Liberty Boy.[51] But when all the talk and resolutions were over, no activities of promise had been set in motion and as a sarcastic rhymer put it:

"To tell the truth, when we had done,
We left off just where we begun."

Equally well might those lines have been written to describe

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49. Mass. Spy, 26 August 1784. The towns were Uxbridge, Mendon, Franklin, and Billingham.

50. The information presented on this convention is deduced from a satiric, Hudibrastic poem which appeared in the Mass. Spy, 5 February 1784.

51. George Cuthbert Groce, Jr., William Samuel Johnson: A Maker of the Constitution (New York, 1937), 136.

the Convention when it came back into session the following March: more protests and condemnations of the old bugaboos, but no positive political action.[52] Indicative of declining interest in the convention was the attendance of delegates from only fifteen towns.[53]

More and more segments of the Connecticut population were seceding from the anti-commutation movement, and for much the same reasons as were operative in Massachusetts. Conservative folk had grown tired and suspicious of the furor and the extra-legal political devices. Every day it became more apparent that nothing effective could or would be done about the commutation either at home or in Congress.[54] At the same time the federal impost which promised so well for non-maritime Connecticut languished in the wings. The impost was roundly defeated by the lower house in January, but Connecticut politicians were even then convinced that a decisive counter-swing was underway.[55] Then

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52. Groce, Johnson, 136. Davies, William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, 5:6.

53. Independent Chronicle, 1 April 1784.

54. New England delegates in Congress were convinced that that body would never rescind the commutation. Jonathan Blanchard to Josiah Bartlett, 5 March 1784; Roger Sherman to Wm. Williams, 4 May 1784, LMCC, 7:462, 513.

55. James Tilton to President of Delaware, 16 February 1784, ibid., 7:443. Benj. Huntington to R. Sherman, 11 February 1784, Lewis Henry Boutell, The Life of Roger Sherman (Chicago, 1896) 120. Maryland Gazette, 18 March 1784.

in March and April came the big break in the anti-commutation forces when the town meetings of Wethersfield and Hartford decided no longer to send delegates to the Middletown conventions.[56] The anti-commutationists were doggedly being forced out of the commercial centers back into the hill towns. Naturally the conservatives were elated and hailed the death of "HOBBY CONVENTION" which was attended, they said, "with violent spasms and convulsions, produced no doubt by the vigour of a strong, fiery constitution, struggling with that new and fatal disorder called Reason."[57] And so, when the assembly once again came into session in May, the doors of the legislative chambers were thrown open, the better for the people to see a federal impost unconditionally granted by a large majority.[58] A great victory had been won by the officers and conservatives but there still remained the vexing problem of the Cincinnati. Many a social conservative had changed his mind about commutation, but retained a strong and active distaste for the new military Society. They still wanted the Cincinnati interred side by side with HOBBY CONVENTION.[59]

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56. Mass. Spy, 11 March 1784. Pa. Gazette, 12 May 1784.

57. Mass. Spy, 29 April, 13 May 1784.

58. Pa. Gazette, 9 June 1784. Jonathan Trumbull, Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut, 1769-1784 (Boston, 1919), 318.

59. Mass. Spy, 27 May 1784.

One man more than any other was shocked at the tidal wave of abuse that poured over the Cincinnati, that was General Washington. For ever so long his meticulous public conduct had planted firmly in the mind of the average American that he, par excellence, was the great American, devoid of partisanship, always ready in a crisis to seek his country's interests first. His famous circular letter of June 1783 had shaken the faith of some who did not like the nationalist timbre of his voice, yet the spiritualized picture of Washington was remarkably little affected. Anti-nationalists found reasons to excuse him. He was in error, many thought, because he did not know all the facts or because he did not fully understand all aspects of the political problems of the day. And after the circular letter Washington had continued on his way being the healer of factional wounds. When he took final leave of his small army in November 1783, he preached to soldier and officer an almost Christ-like forbearance. In the face of public anger over commutation he urged the returning veteran to be of good heart and let "unworthy treatment produce no invective." Pick up your old occupation and rest assured that eventually America would give a just reward.[60] On his

60. "Farewell Orders", 2 Nov. 1783, Pa. Packet, 4 November 1783. Officers like McDougall, Knox, and Pickering thought these Orders much too docile and in the customary reply they found occasion to dwell heavily on the ingratitude of the American people. Almon, Remembrancer 17 part 1 (1784):88-90. Pickering was especially desirous of a strong statement. For his views, see Pickering, Pickering, 1:482, 483, 483-84, 487-88.

triumphal return home to Mount Vernon, Washington everywhere received the acclaim of private citizen and public official. Many sweet words were spoken, fashioned to please a man like Washington with his fervent hopes for a stronger central government.[61] But the torrent of abuse unleashed against the Society had to be calmed or it would not be long before even Washington himself might be engulfed.

Washington received much advice in reference to the Cincinnati, some good, some bad. The worst probably came from General Greene in Rhode Island who had a strong stomach for combat. Nor was it pure humbug when he said that he had not originally been interested in the Cincinnati because "assuming honors hurt my delicacy." Once aroused Greene took a very active and not unsuccessful part in defense of the Rhode Island officers.[62] But a man can be a good instinctive fighter and still not appreciate the nature of the battle. Greene did not realize, for example, that the anti-Cincinnati feeling was nation-wide, that it had different roots from the anti-commutation movement. He informed Washington that "The public seem to want something in New England to quarrel with the officers about, remove one thing and

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61. E. g. see the Address of the Maryland Assembly, 22 December 1783, Pa. Gazette, 7 January 1784. The Marylanders had no doubt but that their constituents would permit an enlargement of congressional powers.

62. Hume, Washington's Correspondence Concerning the Cincinnati, 121.

they will soon find another." Indeed, so badly had Greene read the tea leaves that he actually believed that the anti-Cincinnati feeling was a positive good because it diverted attention from the commutation and made the people more willing to accept the latter measure. Some conservatives may have reacted as Greene surmised but they were a definite minority. As for Greene's belief that the anti-Cincinnati clamor tended to act as a "collateral cause" in keeping the thirteen states united, that also is open to doubt.[63]

Other informants were wiser, for Washington by April had come to the conclusion that if the popular fears could not be soothed by education, then the officers would have to yield.[64] Actually there were no alternatives. America could not then be educated nor propagandized into acceptance of the Cincinnati, for the opposition was not based on evidence capable of verbal disproof. The people were afraid of what the Cincinnati might do, not of what they had done or were doing. To attempt to exorcise that sort of fear through a newspaper and pamphlet campaign would have been

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63. Greene to Washington, 22 April and 6 May 1784, ibid., 142, 165. See also Greene to J. Reed, 14 May 1783, William B. Reed, Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1847), 2:409.

64. Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 126.

futile.[65] If any one word of advice weighed most heavily with Washington, it was doubtless that given by Thomas Jefferson because the latter told of Congressional opinion on the Cincinnati.[66] That body, said Jefferson, had remained silent on the Cincinnati and would continue so unless the home folks brought pressure on their delegates. Be not deceived by that reticence, he cautioned Washington, the majority of Congress were strongly opposed to the Society and would "check it by side blows whenever it comes in their way."[67] Therefore, Jefferson hoped that Washington would stand on ground separated from the Cincinnati. That settled the matter for Washington. He knew that America's ministers abroad were antagonistic, he had been warned by friendly French officers that the Society as constituted was unrepublican, he understood that the political leaders of

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65. The newspapers had already carried numerous letters and "news reports" friendly to the Society. Several pamphlets had also come off the presses as earthworks for the officers' defense. Most notable was one ascribed to Stephen Moylan, a Philadelphia trader who had been an aide-de-camp for Washington. It appeared first in the Quaker City in December 1783 and was signed "An Obscure Individual." It was a fairly well reasoned piece of work, but unlikely to influence anyone except the most objective.

66. On 12 April De La Luzerne wrote Vergennes that Washington was still perplexed over the position he should adopt. Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 80. Jefferson's letter, cited immediately below, probably reached Washington about one week later.

67. Jefferson to Washington, 16 April 1784, LMCC, 7:493-94.

several states were most unfriendly, and then he learned that Congress itself stood in silent but firm opposition. Washington determined thereupon to attend the first General Meeting of the whole Society to be held in May in Philadelphia and to demand sweeping alterations in the Institution of the Society or else its complete extinction.[68]

The General Meeting of the Cincinnati began the fourth of May and continued in existence until the eighteenth. The daily sessions were quietly held in the City Tavern. There was an obvious desire shown by the Society to keep the proceedings as secret as possible.[69] However, a splendid journal of the convention's progress was religiously kept by a Massachusetts officer, Winthrop Sargent, so that there is no doubt as to what happened during the two weeks.[70]

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68. When Washington passed through Annapolis where Congress was then in session he informed some delegate or delegates, perhaps Jefferson, of his intended line of action at the meeting in Philadelphia. Gerry to S. Adams, 7 May 1784, LMCC, 7:516.

69. No Philadelphia paper made contemporary mention of the meeting, the official minutes were not made publicly available until decades later, and the one detailed unofficial record of the proceedings was largely put into cipher. John Cochrane, Letters of Gen. John Cochrane...to the New York Cincinnati (year and city of publication unknown), 96.

70. Except where otherwise noted, the following account of the General meeting is based on Winthrop Sargent "Journal of the General Meeting of the Cincinnati in 1784", ed. by Winthrop Sargent, Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1858), 6:57-115. It is considered best to forego the citation of a long series of page numbers in the "Journal" because the chronological arrangement of that diary permits easy reference.

After the formalities of the first day, the Meeting went immediately into the business at hand. As their guiding genius, the officers looked to Washington for the lead--and they did not wait in vain. He rose and immediately launched into a recital of the opposition to the Society as he had knowledge of it. He then requested representatives from each state to report on the situation as they had assessed it in their own bailiwicks. The New Englanders, including Knox, left no doubt that their states were greatly upwrought. Colonel White from South Carolina agreed, saying that almost all classes in his state were opposed to the Society. It was unnecessary for White to tell what was already common knowledge: Governor Guerard of South Carolina had excoriated the Society, "with the vehemence of Luther" as Sam Adams put it; the state society had already found it expedient to amend its by-laws with a specific declaration that they would not interfere "in any shape whatsoever with the civil polity."[71] John Dickinson speaking for Pennsylvania said the people were especially set against the hereditary aspect of the society. He might well have mentioned how the Pennsylvania branch had found it expedient a few months earlier to bar the use of military titles at their meetings.[72] If General Irvine had been in attendance,

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71. Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation ed., Alfred J. Morrison (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1911), 2:208. Sargent, "Journal", 80n.

72. Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Society...(1785 ed), 71.

he could have told the assembled delegates how the constitutionalist party in Pennsylvania had been disseminating Burke's pamphlet in the interior districts of the state. He could also have told them about the rumor that, if the constitutionalists won a clear victory in the coming elections, all Cincinnati members would be disfranchised.[73] Delaware ascribed the opposition in her counties solely to the Tories. Only the delegates from New York and Georgia claimed little or no opposition. Both New York and New Jersey announced their determination not to back down in craven undignified fashion before unreasonable clamors.

On the whole, however, most of the state reports gave added weight to the demands Washington proceeded to set forth. The goal, he said, was the complete dissipation of all fears entertained by the nation at large. If that could be done by altering the Institution of the Society then alterations would have to be made. If even that step failed to appease the public, and he suspected that would probably be the case, then he was determined to withdraw from the organization. Indeed, he told the delegates, the best solution was an immediate breakup of the Society, retaining only some organizational basis for giving financial relief to needy officers. If the Society were to have any

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73. Irvine to Wayne, 28 April 1784, Charles J. Stille, Major-General Anthony Wayne and the Pennsylvania Line in the Continental Army (Philadelphia, 1893), 296.

chance of a continued existence then it had to enact a completely new constitution, said the General. "Strike out every word, sentence, and clause which has a political tendency." Get rid completely of the hereditary clause--do not try to re-word the idea or attempt to conceal a joker in the rectification for that would only confirm popular suspicion. Permit no new honorary memberships. Receive no donations from foreign citizens. Place the funds in the hands of the state legislatures to be administered with their approval. Abolish the General Meeting and all district meetings. And as he came to the end of this revolutionary list, Washington raised his eyes and closed with the earnest warning that "No alteration short of what is here enumerated will in my opinion, reconcile the Society to the Community, whether these will do it, is questionable."[74]

Then came the parade of testimonials. Washington confided to the delegates the news that Congress was so antagonistic that it was contemplating writing a special clause into a new ordinance concerned with the Western lands whereby citizenship would be denied to any person holding a hereditary title or an order of nobility. The next day Henry Knox read admonitory letters from highly-esteemed French officers and officials. And so it went. The New

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74. The notes for Washington's address are found in Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 152.

York delegates fumed and fussed, sneering at the "rage for popularity," but the tide was running swift. Even those who had originated the Society were firmly seated on the band wagon. "Trimmers, trimmers, trimmers," muttered Major Fairlies of New York who was doubtless speaking of Massachusetts men like Knox and Henry Jackson.[75] They were the ones about whom another New Yorker remarked that they "avoid the badge of the Cincinnati as they would the devil. They smile and smile...."[76]

From the sixth through the thirteenth of May the delegates argued the merits of the new Institution that a special committee was fashioning. Whenever the delegates momentarily forgot themselves, there would be Washington to remind them that their surrender had to be complete or else they would go on without him. Finally Knox, Dickinson, and two other members brought to the floor what has come to be known officially as the "Altered and Amended Institution."[77] It embodied all the ideas that Washington had unswervingly insisted upon. Bitter as many delegates were at having to bow thus ignominiously before the public's demand, it was that or nothing. Everyone knew that Washington was in-

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75. James Fairlie to Benj. Walker, May 1784, Friedrick Kapp, The Life of Frederick William von Steuben (New York, 1859), 567-68.

76. Wm. North to Steuben, 1784, ibid., 567.

77. Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 160-62.

dispensable.[78] And when all was said and done, as one delegate afterwards told his state society, "if we cooly ask ourselves what were our principle motives when we entered into the order, or at least what we pretended, were our motives, and what we endeavoured to convince the people were our real motives,--at the same time taking into consideration the character of the man by whose name we have christen'd our society,--and after satisfying ourselves in those facts, ask whether all those purposes which we had a right to wish to be answered by the institution cannot be fully answered as the institution now stands. I am rather inclined to suppose the candid honest man will answer in the affirmative if he can for a moment divest himself of that ill nature which the conduct of the people at large towards us, has unavoidably created, but whether any one can fully perform the task is a question with me: (Judging from my own feelings)."[79]

The truth was that many other officers were unable to stomach the full retreat with flags dragging in the dust. And since the Society of the Cincinnati resembled the federal government in that the state societies were largely independent of the General Meeting, most state societies either

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78. Kapp, Steuben, 568.

79. Henry Dearborn to General (John) Sullivan, 8 June 1784, Records of the New Hampshire Society, 53.

rejected the new Institution outright, or accepted it only to scrap it a few years later. The Virginia society alone, acting under the immediate eye of Washington, abided rigorously by the decision reached at Philadelphia.[80]

The nation at large, however, saw only the big fact that the Society of the Cincinnati had bowed to the will of the people.[81] The nation was satisfied when it read the newspapers with their reprints of the Altered and Amended Institution, and also a circular letter of explanation signed by Washington.[82] The good word came from everywhere to assure Washington that the controversy had been finally and happily buried.[83] The highest testimonial of all came from General Greene who had had his eyes and ears opened wide by his trip to Charleston during the summer of 1784. Thankfully and honestly he wrote to his former chief, "I am happy you did not listen to advice."[84]

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80. A compact statement of the action taken by all thirteen state societies on the new Institution is found in Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 159-60.

81. Some political leaders continued to distrust the Cincinnati. Especially was this so in Massachusetts. When the new constitution for the United States was under consideration in 1788, the Cincinnati was suspected by some to be a prime mover in the change-over. Again in the 1790's the Democratic-Republican elements spoke opprobiously of the Cincinnati.

82. Nearly all New England newspapers featured these documents on their front page during the first two weeks of June.

83. E. g. Hume, Washington's Correspondence, 194,196,201. As might be expected, no one threw more beautiful bouquets than Henry Knox.

84. Greene to Washington, 29 August 1784, ibid., 205.

CONCLUSION

There were few American officers of the army who in the spring of 1783 were aware of and interested in the basic political problem of their country, particularism versus centralization of political power. Of men like Washington, Knox, St. Clair, and quite a few others that assertion does not hold. But the great majority of officers seem only to have been concerned with finding a hand to feed them. They did not care what shape of body the hand might be attached to. Accordingly a group of civilians found it not at all difficult to tempt the officers' representatives, and supposedly along with them the officer corps and entire army, into supporting the nationalists' tactics in Congress. The particularists could conceivably have met with the same success if they had been able to agree among themselves to take the offensive and make big promises to the army. Instead they muttered angrily but did nothing.

By its originators the Newburgh Affair was doubtless designed to set in motion a sequence of events that would culminate in extensive alterations in American government. But probably few officers envisioned it as at all related to a political coup. Most saw in it only a grand opportunity to gesture defiantly at a civil population which had seemingly lost all friendly interest in the army once peace had become a certainty. Quite possibly even some of the officers who had played key roles in the plot were driven

along more by their own angry emotions than the desire to achieve certain political ends. Although quite unable to substantiate such an assertion, I feel sure that the key to the impassioned Major Armstrong and some of his associates is not buried in political depths.

Despite their lack of interest in the subject, the officer class was not fated to escape from an intimate embrace with American politics. To be sure the Newburgh Affair fizzled so that Congress was not forced to seek the drastic remedies that the nationalists had hoped would be forthcoming. Nevertheless the nationalists succeeded in binding the army tightly to their new funding program. The hope was that such an association would assist in gaining the approval of the states for that program. Washington similarly emphasized the coupling of the army debt and the federal impost plan. Behind it all was the dominant desire to win for the United States a stronger central government.

The army and the impost made a dismal parlay as far as New England was concerned. With increasing vigor the Eastern states had damned the officer class even before Congress unalterably linked the two together in April 1783. There could have been only one upshot. The anti-officer, anti-commutation sentiment induced a strong dislike for the financial program of Congress. Otherwise it would appear not unlikely that all the Eastern states except Rhode Island would have given more generous and speedy support to

the federal impost in 1783.

The anti-commutation movement seems to have served as a standard in 1783-1784 around which rallied the discontented of New England. Much of the unrest and bitterness was centered in the inland rural areas which were to detonate a few years later in Shays Rebellion and lesser explosions of the period. Most assuredly, however, the anti-commutation movement had much wider and broader support than the upheavals of 1786-1787.

This thesis has certainly not documented the next point yet it would seem to follow as a logical necessity: the anti-commutation movement probably confirmed an already established tendency for the officers to gravitate toward the conservative parties in the Eastern states. Conceivably the Massachusetts officers of Revolutionary War experience would have rallied almost to a man in defense of the established government, that claimed to be threatened by the Shaysites, even if the commutation squabble had never been. And conceivably too the apparent unanimity with which the Massachusetts officer class supported the new constitution in 1788 would have been just as complete if the commutation problem had never been known to American history. But at least we are dealing with a possible clue to the sharp contrast in post-war political inclinations between the officers of such states as Massachusetts and Virginia. In the latter state many army officers steadfastly maintained an anti-federalist attitude in the constitutional con-

troversy even as did a number of their brethren in Maryland.

The identity of interests of officers and social conservatives in Massachusetts after the Revolution may seem obvious from the vantage point of the twentieth century, but it is well to remember that the officers had to serve a trial apprenticeship before the singularly good opportunity to prove their trustworthiness was provided by Shays Rebellion. Those who incline to accept the Society of the Cincinnati from its very birth as a mere creature of the social and political conservatives are overlooking the immediate distrust originally aroused in the latter by what seemed to them to be an independent and rival political organization in embryo.

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