

Lesson Twenty-Three

Too Much Independence

LESSON IDEA

To show why the new government, under the Articles of Confederation, could not correct the chaos and confusion in the country, and why the states had to surrender some of their independence to a federal government.

PREPARATION

Purchase or borrow from a library *Your Rugged Constitution*, by Bruce and Esther Findlay, for reference during this series of lessons. See "During the Week" for specific suggestions for using the book to initiate a study of the Constitution. Have family members memorize the Preamble to the Constitution during the week.

IN 1781 the long war between ragged patriots and polished Englishmen came to an end. The once cocky Redcoats had been defeated, their flag no longer flew over American soil, and their officers and soldiers had been forced to retreat. The would-be conquerors had lost not only the war, but their arrogance. Sulking, they packed up and returned to the safe confines of England. Some may have taken comfort from the knowledge that many Europeans gave the infant nation little chance to survive.

But in America, after a round of exuberant victory celebration, Revolutionary leaders began planning and dreaming of the future. Thomas Paine, the Philadelphia pamphleteer whose inspiring words stirred the spirit of independence in 1776, and who later gave new hope to Washington's ragged army at Valley Forge, penned these prophetic words:

"The times that tried men's souls' are over and the greatest and completest revolution the world ever knew, gloriously and happily accomplished . . . Never, I say, had a country so many openings to happiness as this. Her setting out in life, like the rising of a fair morning, was unclouded and — promising. Her cause was good. Her principles just and liberal. Her temper serene and firm. Her con-

duct regulated by the nicest steps, and everything about her wore the mask of honor. It is not every country (perhaps there is not another in the world) that can boast so fair an origin. Even the first settlement of America corresponds with the character of the Revolution. Rome, once the proud mistress of the universe, was originally a band of ruffians. Plunder and rapine made her rich, and her oppression of millions made her great. But America need never be ashamed to tell her birth, nor relate the stages by which she rose to empire"

Do you think Paine accurately described our nation and her future? Why? [Encourage everyone to answer.]

Paine's words were indeed true. Never had a country had so fair an origin — so unmarked by the crippling ties of the past. Situated between two oceans and cushioned by a wilderness of mountains, plains, and deserts in the West, America was cushioned from the old ideas that had marred the nations of Europe and Asia. In the relative isolation of such surroundings, she could chart her own future, selecting the best attributes of past civilizations without undue pressure from overbearing neighbors.

But such pioneering included adversity as well as adventure. Mistakes, failures, and tough lessons learned were all part of the growing process. The 13 former English colonies worked their way toward nationhood, step-by-step, the hard way.

THE FIRST STEP in creating a new government had been taken immediately after the Declaration of Independence was signed. The all-consuming goal, however, was not union, but states' rights. Each of the 13 states, having opted for independence, was determined to put it into practice by running its own affairs in its own way, while giving no quarter to a central authority or the policies of other states.

It soon became evident, however, that wars

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

Americans were far from unanimous in favoring a federal government. Several of the outstanding patriots of the Revolution opposed one and refused to attend the Constitutional Convention. Consult an encyclopedia to find out who they were and why they opposed a national government.

Also, begin a study of *The Federalist Papers*, the collection of essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to explain the Constitution to the residents of New York and defend it against its opponents. Published in New York newspapers under the pseudonym of Publius, the essays examined the complexities of constitutional government — its political structure and principles based on the inherent rights of man. *The Federalist Papers*, are available from American Opinion Book Services, P.O. Box 8040, Appleton, WI 54912.

Occasionally, funds were given promptly. Sometimes however, they were promised but not delivered. As a result, soldiers often went without pay and supplies (i.e., food, shoes, horses, and gunpowder). During the winter of 1777–78 at Valley Forge, 3,000 men were rendered incapable of fighting because they lacked adequate food and clothing. Even officers went without uniforms, and wore blankets and bed-coverings on parade.

What would you have done as a member of Congress to answer the requests of General Washington for essential materiel? Would the lack of food and supplies have affected your morale if you had been a general in the Continental Army with thousands of men to feed and clothe each day? [Discuss the circumstances until each family member realizes the practical consequences of a virtually powerless Congress at the mercy of totally independent state governments.]

In desperation, the Second Continental Congress issued paper money to purchase provisions for the army. At first, patriotic citizens accepted the valueless paper in payment for goods. [Explain that such “paper money” was printed by the government without backing by silver, gold, or some other valuable commodity. Compare the dollar bills we have today with the Continental dollars of the American Revolution. Today, as then, such bills have no silver or gold backing, and are useful only to the extent that people are willing (and are forced by government) to accept them in exchange for goods and services, and in payment of debts.]

ernments. As important as independence was, cooperation and a united front against foreign enemies were also essential. With a legal document entitled the Articles of Confederation, the states agreed to bind themselves together as the United States of America.

The Articles gave the Continental Congress authority to ask each state for money to meet wartime expenses, but denied Congress the power to demand such resources. Congress was little more than a beggar pleading for money to equip and sustain the army. If the states (or a significant number of them) refused, the army would flounder.

AS THE WAR dragged on, and the prospect of victory dimmed, paper money became less and less acceptable. Farmers and manufacturers preferred coins, or “hard money,” in exchange for their produce and wares. During January 1778, the soldiers encamped with Washington went without meat and bread, living for many weeks on pancakes made of flour and water that were baked on flat stones heated in the fireplace.

Sometimes a state merely took care of its own soldiers. At Valley Forge, for example, the men from Connecticut were adequately clothed for duty, while soldiers from other states lacked shoes and warm stockings and had to cut-up blankets to wrap around their bleeding, frozen feet.

There was also a scarcity of lead, which was essential for the manufacture of bullets. When Congress had sufficient money to outfit ships and hire crews, lead was purchased from Europe. But when money was not available, soldiers and civilians went door-to-door, scavenging lead from window, clock, and fishing net weights, and anything else that might provide lead that could be made into bullets. Repayment was promised and, usually, a certificate (I.O.U.) was given to the owner. In one instance, 100 pounds of window weights were taken from the homes of more than 500 residents of the city of New York. According to records of the state Auditor-General, repayment was not made until years after the war’s end.

When money was unavailable to pay soldiers, certificates promising future payment were issued. Congress did what it could to either pay its

could not be fought — nor an army paid, fed, clothed, and equipped — by 13 separate state gov-

bills or give assurance of future payment, but it all added up to a huge debt at the end of the war. The United States of America owed money to its own citizens and to many foreign countries, and Congress did not have the wherewithal to raise the required sums. Making matters worse, soldiers who had been given promissory notes instead of money returned home penniless. Unable to pay the mountain of debts their families had accumulated during the war years, many lost their land.

Picture yourself as a penniless soldier returning to a small farm and finding it impossible to pay bills for food, seed, and livestock. How would you have felt? [Help family members visualize the situation. There were some rebellions by ex-soldiers against state governments, such as Shay's rebellion in 1786. Ask a family member to look up details about this spirited revolt in *Quest Of A Hemisphere* (page 148). Discuss it further during the next day's dinner hour.]

YET THE STATES' RELUCTANCE to relinquish any of their independence to the central authority of Congress was as strong after the war as before. Each state wanted to establish its own import duties, make its own treaties, print its own money, regulate trade in its own fashion, and have its own army. The result was confusion and bickering. Pennsylvania and Connecticut, for example, almost went to war over their conflicting interests in the Wyoming River Valley. And New York had a serious dispute with

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

During the week, find simple examples in home situations that indicate how independent action, carried too far, can lead to confusion and anarchy. For example, if each family member claimed the right to eat meals at the time which suited him or her best, the family kitchen would be in never-ending chaos. Similar situations would develop at school if everyone took lunch hours and recesses whenever they wished. And if everyone were free to drive on whichever side of the road they wished, carnage on our highways would either increase to staggering proportions, or drop to zero because nobody would dare drive. Giving up some independence is necessary for order and progress in the home, school, and society in general. Tie these simple illustrations to the story of the 13 states operating under the Articles of Confederation.



CONTINENTAL CURRENCY was produced on contract by private printers. The designs were as numerous and varied as their creators. This sample, shown front and back, was printed by the firm which was once owned in part by Benjamin Franklin.

New Hampshire over the location of the former's eastern boundary. New York sent troops to the area and New Hampshire was preparing to do the same when an appeal to George Washington to serve as a peacemaker prevented open warfare.

Americans were learning that there is such a thing as too much independence. Washington was one of the first American leaders to understand the need to surrender a certain amount of state power to a federal government. On November 5, 1786 he wrote to James Madison, "The question of a federal government is the great and most important of all subjects ... We are fast emerging to anarchy and confusion." Six months later, as the situation grew steadily worse, he informed Thomas Jefferson (then in Paris), "... the situation of the general government, if it can be called a government, is shaken to its foundations ... In a word it is at an end; unless a remedy is soon applied, anarchy and confusion will inevitably ensue."

What does "anarchy" mean? What are its drawbacks? [Explain that anarchy means no government. When anarchy reigns, there is no legal force to protect life and property, and criminals have a field day. The usual result is a strong dictatorship, demanded by the people, to protect themselves from the violence and uncertainty of anarchy.]

Washington took the lead in projects which required unity between the states. He sought to open communication between New York and the Ohio area. He invited representatives of Virginia and Maryland to meet with him at Mt. Vernon in 1785 to discuss joint plans for using the Potomac River as a commercial waterway. At this meeting

he proposed that the two neighboring states agree on a uniform currency and system of duties for goods moving from one state to another.

Can you imagine how complicated travel between states would have been in those days? [Discuss the problems of each state having its own currency. Use a fanciful trip through two or three states as an example.]

Other men — Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Edmund Randolph, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, to name a few — were working toward similar ends for the same reasons. Most argued that, under the Articles of Confederation, the 13 independent states had no security against foreign invasion, no power to check quarrels amongst themselves, no authority to levy taxes for defense, and no way for Congress to compel them to obey laws between themselves and treaties with other nations. A stronger national government was needed.

Eventually, in May 1787, a meeting was called in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. This gathering became the Constitutional Convention. The great questions in the minds of many delegates was “How much power can safely be given to a federal government?” And “How can the small states, such as Rhode Island, keep their independence when united with large states, such as Pennsylvania and New York?” Next week we will find out how delegates to the Constitutional Convention answered these questions, and what form of government they proposed.

Concluding Thought

During the first 11 years of its existence, the United States of America learned that there is such a thing as too much independence. A balance was needed between federal power and states' rights. In coming weeks we will see how that balance was achieved.

DURING THE WEEK

Use *Your Rugged Constitution* by Bruce and Esther Findlay [Is it in print and available? If not, could we scan and post it on our website?— rwl] for home study by family members. Each section of the Constitution is analyzed in simple terms easily understood by pre-teens. Ask a family member to study the first eight pages about the Preamble, then explain the meaning of each provision of the Preamble to the family during a dinner hour. Ask others to memorize the Preamble's 52 words:

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.