WHENEVER the British army occupied a city of any size during the American Revolution, one or more printers soon set up a press to serve as an instrument of propaganda for the Tory cause. In Philadelphia such an organ was operated by James Humphreys, Jr., son of a Philadelphia conveyancer who was also clerk of the orphans' court and justice of the peace. Having abandoned work at the College of Philadelphia and then the study of physic with his uncle, the future Tory editor had been apprenticed to William Bradford the younger to learn the printer's trade. Within five years after becoming his own master in 1770 he had established a reputation as a book printer. In January of 1775 he had begun publication of The Pennsylvania Ledger; or, the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser.¹

The youthful editor claimed—and a reading of the early numbers of his paper leads one to believe in his sincerity—that he would

be impartial in the growing controversy between Whigs and Tories. He was, however, unfortunate in two particulars. Previously as clerk in the court of chancery he had been obliged to swear allegiance to the king, and he now refused to violate his oath by bearing arms in the colonial cause. Moreover, he had a completely unscrupulous competitor—Benjamin Towne—who was only too willing to arouse popular sentiment against him. In November of 1776 he fled, not to return until Philadelphia was in the possession of the British.

Throughout almost the entire occupation—from the early fall of 1777 to the late spring of 1778—Humphreys printed the *Pennsylvania Ledger* as a Tory news sheet. The paper spans the period of some of the most frequent speculation, of charge and countercharge, in regard to a possible French alliance; and after the receipt of the news of the treaty there were the customary attempts to ridicule or condemn it.

On November 26, 1777, Humphreys reprinted from a London paper of August 23 the information, reputedly received in letters from Paris, that the American deputies, having given up all hope of ever being able to persuade France to join in the war against England, were preparing to leave France and return to America; on the twentieth of the next month he copied from a New York paper an extract from a London news sheet according to which the loyalists in America were to be "perfectly easy on the score of a French war, and depend on it the provincials will not meet in their ports the same countenance as formerly"; and on the last day of 1777 he printed the statement, previously made in other Tory papers, that all the French officers serving with the rebels had been called home.

The first issue of the *Ledger* in the new year carried the report of a "late London paper" telling of the treatment given Silas Deane in Paris, which may have accounted for the unexpected arrival of that gentleman from France. It was said that Deane met with insults every time he appeared on the Paris streets and that "the old Fox, Franklin, secures himself from similar treatment, by silence and seclusion." Toward the close of January, Humphreys quoted from a Paris paper of October 30 an account of the effect

---

2 Full title—*The Pennsylvania Ledger; or the Weekly Advertiser.*

3 *Pennsylvania Ledger, January 3, 1778.*
on the American trade of the "Minister's late conduct." The merchants of Paris would not allow the Americans any credit, according to the report, and everything had to be paid for when ordered. This state of affairs would, it was feared, soon "reduce the mighty States of America to the most cruel want of shoes and stockings."

On February 4 Humphreys expressed the opinion that Congress, in spite of the "articles by their different printers and printers correspondents," must have finally become convinced that America could hope for no help from France and Spain. The next month he quoted a New York dispatch of six weeks before to the effect that the king of France absolutely refused to consider war with England. In the same issue he reprinted an article describing the arrival of French troops in the West Indies and stating that the coast of France was lined with troops. Readers of the Ledger were sarcastically reminded, however, that such reports, which were completely groundless, had been printed by the rebels ever since the Declaration of Independence and were merely attempts on the part of the rebel leaders to deceive their followers.

The loyalist editor continued to reprint excerpts from the London press in which the idea of a war with France was ridiculed, but on April 11 he copied a London dispatch of January 8 in which was expressed the possibility that France might have signed some kind of treaty with the rebels. Four days later he assured his readers that there was no basis for the rumor of a French war. On May 9 the Ledger carried a brief news item from London dated March 21 to the effect that "Lord Viscount Stormont, our late ambassador at the court of Versailles, arrived in town last night" and also a copy from a paper of March 17 of the king's speech informing Parliament of the treaty between France and America.

Two days later Humphreys quoted from a London paper a correction of the report of Lord Stormont's return together with an explanation that illness had detained the ambassador. In the same issue he expressed the Tory belief—or perhaps hope—that

4 Ibid., January 28, 1778.
5 Ibid., March 21, 1778.
6 For instance, see ibid., April 8, 1778.
there would be no war with France. "Some people are of opinion," he remarked, "that the King of France and his ministers, now that they find we are thoroughly aroused and will not suffer ourselves to be bullied, are disposed to renounce their tobacco contract with America, and to smoke the calumette of peace with England."

By the middle of May, Humphreys was willing to admit the possible validity of the French alliance but not its worth or desirability to the rebels. On the thirteenth he copied parts of the French agreement from a York-town paper of the fourth and filled nearly a column with editorial comment. He made four chief criticisms. In the first place, he said, the agreement might not be any more real than some of the other information from the same quarter. Secondly, because of the people's consternation over its hasty rejection of conciliation (the Carlisle proposals) Congress had deemed it necessary to gloss over the alliance with France by making it seem much more advantageous than it really was. Thirdly, even if the terms as printed were correct, the alliance "certainly ought the more to alarm every true friend to the future peace and prosperity of America" because France had always been tricky and treacherous and had surely entered the alliance with the hope of ultimately gaining the colonies for herself. For his fourth point Humphreys turned to what was destined to become the chief Tory weapon in the attack on the alliance—religion. Why, he asked, should the colonies wish to desert England, "the ancient and chief support of the protestant religion in the world," for Catholic France?

The Congress have wonderfully altered their tone of late. The time was, when the bare toleration of the Roman catholic religion in Canada, though stipulated for by the articles of capitulation was treated as a wicked attempt to establish "a sanguinary faith which had for ages filled the world with blood and slaughter."

Judge, then, what we have to hope or expect from such an alliance! We not only run a manifest risque of becoming slaves ourselves, under the treacherous title of independency, but we are doing everything in our power to overturn the protestant religion and extinguish every spark both of civil and religious freedom in the world! These sentiments, no doubt, will be ridiculed by those who
are interested in supporting the measures of Congress; but they surely demand the serious attention of every distinguished friend of this country, and of every man who wishes well to the rights of humanity and conscience in every part of the world.\footnote{Pennsylvania Ledger, May 13, 1778.}

Three days later the editor reprinted an essay from a rebel paper in which it was pointed out that since the expense of the war was so great that England could not possibly hope to gain from its conduct, her only motive must be "blind revenge.\footnote{Ibid., May 16, 1778.} In refutation he brought up the matter of French despotism.

Britain has given convincing proofs \cite{Pennsylvania Ledger, May 13, 1778.} that she does not thirst for revenge, but wishes still to bring the dispute to an amicable accommodation; but, if our \cite{Ibid., May 16, 1778.} leaders can carry their ambitious purpose, we must be compelled to renounce the offers of freedom and peace from Britain \cite{referring to the Carlisle commission} in order to become, under a nominal independence, the aiders and abettors of French ambition \ldots to support a system of despotism, which has long threatened the civil and religious liberties of all the protestant part of the world.

Although Humphreys did not attack Benjamin Franklin with the bitterness of John Howe, Tory editor at Newport, Rhode Island, he made some reference to the American ambassador to the court of France. On March 25 he borrowed from a Boston paper of February 23 a statement that Dr. Franklin had at the instigation of Lord Stormont been the victim of an attempted assassination. According to the report the knife blade had hit a rib and was therefore not instantly fatal, though it was feared that the wounded man had since died. Humphreys commented that while Franklin might well be dead, since men approaching the fourscore mark quite frequently were known to die, the assertion that Lord Stormont had planned an assassination was an abominable falsehood indicative of the fact that Congress wished to make Franklin even in death subservient to the cause of rebellion. Two weeks later the editor quoted a declaration of a New London paper for March 13 that the report of the assassina-
tion was untrue. In the next issue he copied from an English paper of January 31 the story that Congress had notified Franklin of a popular demand for peace and instructed him to try to get France to intervene in an effort to secure as favorable terms as possible.

Another subject featured by many of the loyalist editors was the Carlisle commission and its attempt to effect a peace settlement with Congress. Humphreys first mentioned it on April 18, when he devoted a page and a half to a reprint from a London paper on February 19 which included both the text of the act that had created the commission and Lord North's speech in regard to the conciliatory plan in which it was pointed out to Parliament that there were three alternatives: to strengthen British forces and continue the war, which would be very expensive; to recall the army and grant independence to the colonies; and to offer terms of conciliation. The next issue of the Ledger included a letter written in London on February 23 in which it was claimed that Lord North expected the colonies to refuse the terms offered them because in spite of their talk about the constitution and legal rights they had wanted only independence from the very first, and that he had consented to the creation of the commission only as a means of defeating and silencing the troublesome home minority, who had been continually accusing him of having made no attempt at conciliation.

On May 6 Humphreys reprinted the resolutions passed by Congress on receipt of the "rumour" that Great Britain was going to propose a peace. He indulged in half a column of editorial comment.

The principal claims of the majority of the people of America [he wrote in part] are—to be relieved from parliamentary taxation, and to be placed as they stood in the year 1773 [1763?]. The King and parliament of Great-Britain have manifested a disposition to accede to their claims; and, that every point in dispute may be freely discussed and amicably compromised, a cessation of hostilities may be proposed.  

Ibid., April 8, 1778.
Ibid., April 11, 1778.
Ibid., April 22, 1778.
Compare this excerpt with one from the May 5 issue of Robertson's Royal Pennsylvania Gazette. It is apparent that Humphreys "borrowed" this comment without giving credit.
Ten days later the editor published a letter addressed “To the people of America” by “a British Officer,” who discussed point by point the declaration or resolve passed by Congress on first hearing of the peace commission and concluded by urging the people of America to break away from the selfish and evil leadership of Congress, the members of which were concerned only with their own private advancement, and look after their own interests.

Stories of desertion and insubordination in the rebel ranks were always hailed with glee by the loyalist editors and given prominent places in their papers. On December 10, 1777, Humphreys took from a New York paper of the preceding month a story that the recently planned attack against the British forces in Rhode Island had been given up because the militiamen, who had been compelled to join the expedition against their will, had threatened to shoot their officers in the back if they were forced to attack. Three weeks later he devoted considerable space to tales of deserters coming into Philadelphia who portrayed the terrible suffering in the rebel camp. “Yet such is the hardened obstinacy of their leaders . . .,” he observed, that they “would suffer them to perish by piece-meal, rather than fail in their selfish, ambitious views.” On January 7 the editor remarked that the rebel soldiers were severely treated by their officers and that there was “much murmuring among them.” On April 8 he endeavored to refute a story in the Williamsburg paper to the effect that Governor Caswell of North Carolina had mustered five thousand volunteers to march to Washington’s aid; the volunteers had never been mustered except on paper, he declared, and there was said to be so much disinterest among the men of the area that it would be dangerous for the governor to try to march them north. Subsequent issues of the Ledger in the same month carried stories of desertions from the American army and of difficulties encountered by military authorities in their efforts to build up new forces.13

On October 15, 1777, Humphreys accused the rebel officers of falsehood in their reports on the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, and on at least three other occasions during the ensuing winter and spring he stated that the Whigs did not tell the truth.14

13 For instance, see Pennsylvania Ledger, April 15 and April 29, 1778.
On February 14 he asserted that the rebel editors resorted to both lies and exaggerations; four weeks later he followed the reprint of a news item from a rebel paper with the statement, "Good as your authority is, this is a base falsehood"; and at still another time he branded articles from rebel papers as examples of rebel dishonesty. This type of denunciation was very common among the editors on both sides of the conflict.

Like all other loyalist editors Humphreys frequently mentioned the treatment of Burgoyne's surrendered army as an example of the dishonesty and treachery of the rebel leaders. On March 11, 1778, he reprinted a New York editorial according to which "among other detestable pretexts fabricated by the infamous rebels" for detaining the army the "equivocal revolted Yankees" had claimed that they had discovered the flags of several regiments hidden by the British in violation of the terms of their surrender. By "such villainous assertions, which have no foundation in truth," commented the editor, "they mask their infernal perfidy, which is of so enormous a magnitude that it absorbs every idea of punic faith."

The decision of Congress on February 20, 1778, to make all enlistments hold to the end of the war gave Humphreys another opportunity to point out the perfidy of that body in regard to the treatment of the surrendered army. "A correspondent observes," he sarcastically noted on March 30, "that the consistent conduct of the venerable Congress is truly admirable; after having broke faith with General Burgoyne and his army, they disdain to keep it with their own; and that in the former case it was doing them too much honor, to suppose they were capable of adhering to any treaty or agreement."

Ten days later he printed a letter of complaint from General Burgoyne to General Heath. On April 25 he again mentioned the unfair treatment accorded the captured British soldiers.

There was also, it would appear, a definite attempt on the part of loyalist editors to convince their readers that while the Tories and their British allies were very humane, the rebels were cruel

---

14 Ibid., March 14, 1778.
15 Ibid., March 25, 1778.
16 Pennsylvania Ledger, extra supplement, March 30, 1778.
17 Pennsylvania Ledger, April 8, 1778.
and heartless. On December 13, 1777, the Ledger carried a story of the callous burning of General De Lancey's house by the rebels. The following February several tales of the kindness of the British officers were told, and in contrast the Pennsylvania militia under General Lacey was accused of unduly harsh and cruel acts. In March, Humphreys stated that large numbers of unjustly persecuted loyalists were at last rising up, forming armed groups, and rendering great services to their cause. Accounts of rebel cruelty continued until the end of the paper's existence.

One very noticeable trend in all the Tory news sheets was the apparently conscious effort to convince the common people in the Whig ranks that their leaders were treacherous and self-seeking. On December 10, 1777, Humphreys reprinted a speech by Governor Livingston of New Jersey as "a specimen of the progress of the tyranny, knavery, and oppression of congressional authority." At the end of the same month he published the following editorial, presumably written by himself:

The pains taken by the leaders in the present rebellion, with a view solely to the promotion of their own ambition, and the establishment of their intolerable tyranny, is not to be paralleled in any history. Misrepresentation, falsehood and fraud, have been the means by which it has been begotten, brought forth, and nourished. A people, in the enjoyment of more liberty and happiness, than existed in any other spot on the globe, they have [been?] deluded by these unmanly artifices from a state of Peace, Plenty and Freedom, to that of War, Want and inexpressible Tyranny. 'Tis true, the field of falsehood and deception is by a variety of circumstances grown more confined: The people's credulity too often imposed upon, at length, is, in a manner, shut against their glaring impositions. They find, instead of receiving at the hands of these demagogues the liberty so often solemnly promised, they have nothing but the black and racking potion of oppression. They have taken a candid and thoughtful view of their present extreme Misery under this oppression, and compared it with that scene of Freedom and Hap-

"Ibid., February 21, 1778.
"Ibid., February 25, 1778.
"Ibid., March 18, 1778.
"Ibid., March to May, et passim, only variation being that in the issue of May 16 Humphreys accused the rebels of whipping their prisoners.
which they were in the full possession of under the mild rule of the best of sovereigns, and yet, it is strange to tell, that these daring deluders of mankind, never out of hope—never tired of their wickedness, and without the least remorse at the bleeding distress of their country, or at the multitude of souls they have hurried into eternity, without the shortest opportunity of repentance, to gratify their insatiable thirst of power, they still continue their attempts to delude their brethren, and to sacrifice them to it.

In January, Humphreys referred to "the slandering falshoods [sic] of a licentious Congress." In February he quoted a "gentleman" to the effect that during two years of war no less than forty thousand Americans had been killed in battle or died of camp disorders and concluded, "How shocking must this reflection be to those ambitious men, who have been the means of sending into eternity so great a number of souls, to gratify their thirst after wealth and power." Nearly the entire second page of the issue for February 28 was devoted to Tory propaganda: first an editorial pointing out that the present sad condition of the colonies was due to the selfish greed of a few men, for in the very beginning there had been no real reason for revolting against Great Britain; next a copy of what purported to be a letter from Washington revealing the woeful condition of the army, the hopelessness of trying to obtain new enlistments, and the complete uselessness of the militia; and finally a news item to the effect that the people of New Jersey had so much resentment against their leaders that they were flocking to the standards of the British detachment that had crossed the Delaware.

In March, Humphreys copied from an Easton paper of February 6 a story of revolt in England according to which mobs had destroyed the houses of Lords North and Bute. His comment included mention of the bonfires and other forms of celebration with which this fabrication was greeted in rebel circles. He remarked that it had long been the custom of rebel leaders to stage demonstrations in order to give their intelligence of good news the appearance of truth, thus deceiving the people; "and yet," he

* * *

* Ibid., January 28, 1778.
* Ibid., February 14, 1778.
* Ibid., March 7, 1778.
continued, "it is hardly to be imagined, notwithstanding all their stratagems of this kind, that even the blind followers of these wicked votaries of rapine and murder, can credit such absurd and notorious falsehoods." In the same issue he published a reprint from a New York paper of January 15 revealing a difference of opinion between John Hancock and Samuel Adams and prophesied that "when the lunacy of the former is separated from the villanies [sic] of the latter, the deluge of destruction . . . [will] overwhelm them and their infatuated votaries in prodigious ruin."

To another reprint from the same paper concerning the requirement of the "whimsical state of Connecticut" that each of its citizens pay eighteen dollars a year "for the privilege of wearing a head" Humphreys added a bracketed observation that "had their heads been worth six-pence each, they would never have run their necks into so degrading a yoke." Also in this issue he scornfully made light of statements from the Lancaster paper of February 11 that LaFayette was going home merely because of the pressure of private business and that the French officers accompanying him as far as Boston would return to the army, and said that informed people knew all French officers had been called home by their king and that the item was an example of how the congressional leaders "impose on the credulity of their followers by the grossest falsehoods."

Four days later Humphreys pounced upon a New York editor's depiction of Hancock appearing in public "with all the pageantry and state of an Oriental Prince," with an elegant chariot and four liveried servants, "escorted by fifty horsemen with drawn sabers." "So at present figures the man," he scathingly remarked, "who owes his greatness to his country's ruin." A week later he published the much-repeated story that the members of Congress were gathering boats in which to carry their families and property beyond the mountains because before long they would have to flee "from the wrath of the people they have so long deluded." In April a letter from "Hotspur" contained reference to the treachery and perfidy of Congress in forcing men who enlisted for short periods to serve throughout the war.

---

* Ibid., March 11, 1778.
* Ibid., March 18, 1778.
* Ibid., April 4, 1778.
In the first May issue appeared a letter to the editor from "Bombasticus" together with a copy of resolutions passed by Congress on April 23 asking that the separate state legislatures provide for full pardon to citizens who had taken the British side but who would now surrender themselves to the Whigs.\textsuperscript{29} It was suggested in the letter that the resolutions were an infringement on states' rights and sounded like "orders to subject states, concerning their subordinate duties of legislation."

A week later a Ledger correspondent signing himself "Hampden" addressed a letter to "the sensible people" of New Jersey and Pennsylvania in which he pointed out that they had lost freedom and liberty—even freedom of speech and freedom of the press—and that their Congress had deteriorated until it was now "an oppressive and paltry one, a little too literally composed of broken attorneys and ruined surgeon's mates. . . ."\textsuperscript{30} In closing, the writer proclaimed, "Thus doth America stand another melancholy instance where that little word Liberty, bawled forth from the mouths of artful and designing men, hath seduced the freest people on the face of the globe, to the arms of the most abject slavery."

Another point which was often a target for the verbal shots of Tory printers was the weakness of the Continental currency or the bad financial condition of the new state governments. On December 20, 1777, the Ledger carried a story from a New York paper of December 6 to the effect that the people of Boston were suffering from want of food and supplies because the farmers in spite of all "their loud clamours for liberty" preferred to sell to Burgoyne's troops, who paid in "gold and silver." On February 4 the editor ridiculed the idea that the "Grand American Congress" could not make any more dollars for want of rags,\textsuperscript{31} stating that a large supply was expected from Washington's army and that there was reason to believe that the entire country had "never abounded more in that article." In the March 18 issue appeared a letter from "Pacificus," who, after making fun of the currency and "exposing" the tax situation, urged his fellow citizens "to fly from this prospect of inevitable ruin, back to the constitutional ground

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, May 2, 1778.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, May 9, 1778.
\textsuperscript{31} Referring to the use of rags in making paper—thus for paper currency.
of peace and safety from which they have been seduced by the phantom of Independency."

While the Tory editors did not hesitate to apply direct criticism to the rebels, they frequently resorted to satire. Typical of their trenchant wit is the following excerpt from a sarcastic letter written by "An Officer" on Washington's report to Congress of the battle of Brandywine and reprinted by Humphreys on January 21, 1778, from a New York paper of the preceding November 20: "The morning of the day of action was extremely foggy. To the rebels this was a misfortune of a very particular nature, to the royal army it could be none; their optics not being quite so much obscured as those of the sons of faction and sedition."

Another way in which loyalist editors sought to further their cause was to make appeals for enlistment in Tory volunteer regiments or in the regular British army. On October 29, 1777, Humphreys copied from the Morning Chronicle (London) a letter from J. Watts to the ministry in which it was suggested that the "counties of Albany, Dutchess and Westchester, in the province of New York, are in an absolute state of vassalage" and that if the government would offer free land for enlisting in the British army, it might gain at least six thousand soldiers at no expense. In the same issue he asked for loyalist volunteers in Philadelphia; and in November, Howe offered free land to all who would join the British army for two years. In December, Humphreys reprinted an article from Rivington's New York paper urging that all loyalists enlist in the British army and fight to protect their "property, interests, and everything dear to them."

In spite of the skill with which much of the propaganda was handled, there were inserted occasional reprints whose inconsistency with editorial Tory inclination can be explained only as evidences of carelessness, reminiscent perhaps of more peaceful times when any reprint had been acceptable if it helped fill up space. On February 4, 1778, for example, Humphreys copied from a rebel paper a letter of January 12, 1778, in which "C. Pulaski, Gen. of Cavalry" announced to the magistrates at Trenton that he would be in their vicinity for a period to refresh his men and secure new enlistments, assured the people that he would do all in his

---

Pennsylvania Ledger, November 26, 1777.

Ibid., December 3, 1777.
power to protect them from the British and the Tories, and asked that citizens keep him informed of all movements of the enemy troops. There is no ostensible reason for a Tory editor's giving this letter publicity.

A similar instance of apparent carelessless is a letter copied in the Ledger for April 29, 1778, from Horatio Gates to the Earl of Thanet saying that the colonies would never give up their independence and urging that England recognize that fact in order that she and America might become firm friends and allies before it was too late. Another reprint told of the work being done to strengthen West Point by fifteen thousand men, while still another included, with no editorial comment, stories of British and Tory cruelty and treachery.

Like all other wartime papers the Ledger reprinted many official reports, letters between generals, and proclamations by commanding officers. These communications were usually many months old. For example, on July 11, 1777, Burgoyne wrote from Skanesborough-house a report on the capture of Ticonderoga which reached London on August 23, having made exceptionally rapid time, and was published there two days later. The report arrived back in America in a copy of the London paper and was reprinted in the Ledger for November 5.

Humphreys suspended publication of the Pennsylvania Ledger on May 23, 1778, and went to New York with the British army. There he became a merchant, and at the close of the war he went as a loyalist émigré to Nova Scotia by way of England, where he purchased a complete printer's outfit. For a time he published a news sheet, but since it did not prove to be a paying enterprise he soon gave it up and again became a merchant. In 1797 he returned to Philadelphia and until his death in 1810 was one of the best-known book printers in the section. He never tried to reestablish his newspaper, and records show no discrimination against him because of his loyalist sympathies during the war.

There is no way to measure the importance of the wartime propaganda issued from the presses of Tory editors. However, the

---


fury to which Whig editors were roused and the fact that the Tory papers received considerable encouragement and frequent subsidy from the military and political leaders of the British cause lead one to assume that at least in the opinion of their contemporaries such men as James Humphreys, Jr., played a significant part in the conflict being waged.