CONSTITUTIONALISTS AND REPUBLICANS IN THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, 1778-1786

BY H. JAMES HENDERSON*

SINCE Louis Namier led the way toward a re-examination of the structure of parliamentary politics during the reign of George the Third, no conscientious student of late eighteenth-century British political history has felt safe in commenting upon political parties in Parliament without taking note of the particular circumstances of borough politics. American scholars have not experienced the effects of such a commanding influence, but there has been a tendency for them to question whether their assumptions about the coming of the Revolution may have been limited by preoccupation with issues which were relevant to a confrontation between the crown and the colonies, but which did not reflect the realities of a federal revolution remarkable for its discrete origins. A similar question has been asked quite recently about the formulation and acceptance of the Constitution, a document which was just as much the product of an intermixture of particular interests and special circumstances as it was the result of conflicting philosophies and generalized economic classes.

In the same manner the configuration of national politics during the Revolutionary and Confederation eras might be re-examined, for while most students of national politics during this period have recognized the existence of a complicated interplay of national and state interests, there have been few attempts to supply a comprehensive analysis of this relationship. It is well known that the unity of the Massachusetts delegation in the Continental Congress during the early war years was jeopardized by tensions between the Adams and Hancock wings of the Massachusetts Whig alliance, and that Richard Henry Lee's support of the New England bloc in Congress encouraged his opponents in

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Virginia to mount an attack which almost toppled him from his seat in Congress. The ruffled relationships between Whipple and Langdon in New Hampshire, Ward and Hopkins in Rhode Island, Chase and Carroll in Maryland, Laurens and Drayton in South Carolina all reciprocally energized partisan antagonisms on both national and state levels. Other examples could be cited in both New England and the South. Clearly, however, the most active interplay between national and state politics during the Revolutionary and Confederation eras occurred in the Middle States, particularly in Pennsylvania.

The linkage of partisan politics in Congress and the state of Pennsylvania was probably inevitable, since Congress resided in Philadelphia during most of the Revolution and transacted much of its commercial affairs through merchants such as Robert Morris who were deeply involved in the relatively well-developed party controversies of Pennsylvania. Incidents like the Holker affair, the dispute over the sloop Active, the interchange between the Pennsylvania Council and Congress over the speculations of Benedict Arnold, and the mutiny of the Pennsylvania line clearly suggest that the politics of the Continental Congress and the politics of Pennsylvania cannot be considered as separate phenomena. Indeed, some evidence suggests that factional groups in the two governments may have been closely linked.

Historians such as Robert L. Brunhouse, who discussed all of the points mentioned above, have noted this connection and stressed the influence of the Lee-Deane quarrel upon factional struggles in Pennsylvania. Brunhouse indeed appears to go as far as to accept the position of a delegate to Congress in the Lee-Deane imbroglio as evidence for his orientation in Pennsylvania party politics. He assumes, for example, that Samuel J. Atlee was a Constitutionalist, but labels him as a "moderate" Constitutionalist for no apparent reason other than Atlee's opposition to Lee in Congress. Brunhouse is probably right about Atlee's partisan affiliations, yet he and other historians who have dealt with Pennsylvania politics have naturally been concerned with Congressional affairs only in terms of Congress's influence upon Pennsylvania. It should be equally instructive to know the rela-

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tionship between parties in a state such as Pennsylvania and the
full spectrum of Congressional legislation whether relevant or
not to the internal politics of the state. It is the purpose of this
paper to probe into this relationship.

This study is based upon a bloc analysis of the voting records
of the Continental Congress during the years 1778 through 1786
—the interval when a sufficient number of roll call votes were
recorded in the Congressional Journals to permit such an analysis.
By using this technique it is possible to state how often any two
delegates agreed with each other and how often they disagreed
with one another in terms of the full voting record. (Actually
about two-thirds of the entire list of roll calls was included, since
some votes were rejected because they produced no significant
disagreement, and others were discarded when they resulted in no
significant change from the preceding vote or votes either in terms
of content or alignment.) The analysis was made on a yearly basis,
so for any year between 1778 and 1786 it is possible to establish
ratios of agreement versus disagreement for most of the Pennsyl-
vania delegates, and to examine as well the relationship between
the voting tendencies of the Pennsylvania delegates, and delegates
from other states. (Under the computer program used in this
study only forty-seven delegates could be handled, and this meant
that some delegates with erratic attendance records had to be ex-
cluded. In no case was a delegate present for more than twenty-
five percent of the roll calls excluded.)

The average tenure of Pennsylvania delegates was notably short
by comparison with tenures of those from other states such as
Massachusetts and Connecticut. Yet in the midst of this flux it
is not difficult to find a pattern which is intelligible both in terms
of domestic Pennsylvania politics and partisan antagonisms in
Congress. It appears, for example, that the Pennsylvania delega-
tions during the years 1778 through 1786 fall into three different
groups, the first sitting on Congress between 1778 and 1780, the
second between 1781 and 1784, and the third for the remainder
of the period, 1785 through 1786. The first group included Robert
Morris, William Clingan and Daniel Roberdeau for 1778, John
Armstrong, Samuel J. Atlee, Frederick Muhlenberg, James Searle,
William Shippen (the elder), and James McLene for 1779, and
the latter four delegates along with Timothy Matlack during
1780. These delegates were elected during a period of Constitutionalist ascendancy in the Pennsylvania assembly, and were mostly "Radicals" in that they supported the Constitution of 1776 and were advocates of independence at a time when the assembly refused to effect the final breach. There are perhaps only three exceptions to this rule: Robert Morris was of course a leading Republican (or anti-Constitutionalist); Frederick Muhlenberg apparently was a Radical during the early stages of the Revolution, but gradually moved toward the Republicans; Samuel J. Atlee, something of an unknown quantity, was probably less than a convinced Constitutionalist.

The second group, serving between 1781 and 1784, reflected the Republican or "Conservative" orientation of the legislature during the later war years. It included only one delegate who had served during the first period—Samuel J. Atlee—who had deviated from the majority position of the delegation during his earlier term in 1779, and perhaps had made himself acceptable to the Republicans on that account. The other delegates serving with Atlee during 1781 and 1782 included George Clymer (who had previously been a member in 1776), Joseph Montgomery and Thomas Smith.

It might be repeated that not all delegates who were elected to Congress were included in the analysis. An inspection of Table I will indicate, however, that delegates with significant attendance records have been taken into account.

Brunhouse, Counter-Revolution, chs. 2 and 3.

Atlee left a memoir in which he defended his actions during the Battle of Long Island (when he was captured by the British), but his correspondence as published in the Pennsylvania Archives and the few letters of his at the Library of Congress and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania give virtually no hint of his political attitudes. He was passed over in the election to Congress in 1779, and this may have been due to dissatisfaction in the Pennsylvania assembly with his record in Congress during such events as the Lee-Deane affair. This is the belief of Brunhouse who calls Atlee a "moderate Constitutionalist" (Counter-Revolution, 90). It would seem, however, that a conclusive assessment of Atlee's politics strictly in terms of Pennsylvania party structure will have to await further evidence. There is not doubt, on the other hand, that Atlee was out of step with the Constitutionalists in Congress; indeed, in terms of his voting record he was not even a "moderate Constitutionalist." The positions of Muhlenberg and Morris in Pennsylvania can be established with more certainty. Muhlenberg was being described by the Radicals as a turncoat who had gone over to the Republicans by 1782, a judgment his record in Congress would bear out (Pennsylvania Gazette, October 18, 1782). Morris was a well-known Republican, a favorite political target of the Constitutionalists, and the only delegate of the group serving between 1778 and 1780 who signed a resolution published in the Pennsylvania Gazette, March 24, 1779, framed by the members of the "Republican Society" criticizing the Constitution.
Clymer and Smith belonged to the Republican Society, a group which announced its opposition to the Constitution of 1776 in the Pennsylvania Gazette, March 24, 1776, and membership in which was a convenient index to anti-constitutionalist orientation in Pennsylvania politics. The delegations of 1783 and 1784 involved a complete change from the previous two years, but continued
to represent the Republican position. Three members, Thomas Fitzsimmons, James Wilson and Thomas Mifflin, were members of the Republican Society, while the other two, Richard Peters and John Montgomery, were generally sympathetic with the Republicans.  

There was another complete changeover during the last two years 1785 and 1786. Mifflin and Montgomery were replaced by Joseph Gardner, William Henry, David Jackson and Charles Pettit in 1785, while during 1786 Pettit remained and was joined by John Bayard and Arthur St. Clair. Not one of these delegates belonged to the Republican Society; indeed, Pettit, Henry and Bayard were active Constitutionalists, while Jackson seems quite clearly to have been aligned with the Constitutionalists. Not much is known about Gardner, although it is likely that he too was on good terms with the predominantly Constitutionalist legislature of 1784 which elected the 1785 delegation. St. Clair seems to have been a Republican, but if he was an exception to the rule in terms of Pennsylvania party politics, his record in Congress was not—he was in remarkable agreement with the pronounced Constitutionalist Bayard in the roll call votes. Of course this fact may say as much about the nature of Congressional politics as about the consistency of St. Clair’s Republicanism.

Unquestionably party affiliation in state politics did influence voting tendencies of the Pennsylvania delegates in the Continental Congress. For example, delegations composed of both Constitutionalists and Republicans were less cohesive than delegations dominated by one party or the other. In 1778 the Constitutionalist Roberdeau and the Republican Morris agreed on only 61% of the votes they cast in common, while in 1779 McLene, Armstrong, Shippen and Searle—all Constitutionals—had on the

5 Peters’ correspondence indicates he was critical of the Constitution of 1776 (see Peters to Wayne, May 27, 1777, in Charles J. Stille, Anthony Wayne [Philadelphia, 1893], 68). Peters is described by Brunhouse as a “first line Republican” (Counter-Revolution, 124). Joseph Montgomery received such a strong endorsement from the legislature that he must have had support from both Republicans and Constitutionalists, but John Montgometry appears to have been clearly aligned with the Republicans (ibid.).

6 See ibid., 169, on Jackson. Brunhouse also asserts that St. Clair was a Republican (p. 187), while Randolph Downes in the Dictionary of American Biography, XVI, 293-295, calls him an anti-Constitutionalist.

7 St. Clair agreed with Bayard on twenty-six of the twenty-seven votes they cast in common under this analysis of the voting record for 1786.
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average an 84% level of agreement with each other. The 1779 Constitutionalist delegates had a mean agreement of only 59% with Atlee and 75% with Muhlenberg. Again, the divergence of Atlee and Muhlenberg from the Constitutionalist majority in 1779 may be compared with the average level of agreement of 84% between the Republican delegates Fitzsimmons, John Montgomery, Peters and Wilson in 1783.

Actually, since most delegations showed a decided Constitutionalist or Republican tinge, there are other indices which serve better to illustrate the influence of state party attitudes among Congressional delegates. By tabulating the number of instances in which Pennsylvania members of Congress agreed with delegates from other states on 75% of the votes cast in common by each pair of delegates on an annual basis, for example, it is possible to determine how a given Pennsylvania delegation figured in the total structure of bloc alignments in Congress. Such a comparison with delegates from other states reveal distinct differences between the voting tendencies of the Constitutionalist and Republican delegations.

Table 1 summarizes the voting tendencies of the Pennsylvania delegates in terms of agreements (75% or more) between each Pennsylvania member and delegates from other geographic sections. The summarization by sections rather than individuals was done for two reasons—for simplicity, and because bloc alignments in Congress followed essentially sectional lines. It should be noted, however, that there were exceptions to the rule of sectional blocs, particularly in the Middle States between 1778 and 1780. During those years the Middle State delegations tended to split and align with either New England or the South: New Jersey and Pennsylvania inclined decidedly toward New England, while New York tended to join a Southern bloc. Thus the nineteen agreements between Pennsylvania members and delegates from other Middle State delegations actually reinforced the alignment between Pennsylvania and New England, since a

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The 75% level of agreement is established arbitrarily as evidence of significant concurrence between two delegates. The same figure was used in determining voting blocs referred to below. This is, incidentally, the approximate average level of agreement between members of political parties in Congress today.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pennsylvania Delegates</th>
<th>New England</th>
<th>Middle States</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>1779</td>
<td>1780</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Atlee</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muhlenberg</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Shippen</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>John Montgomery</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peters</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mifflin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Montgomery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781-</td>
<td>Ratio of Actual to</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Possible Agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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a N. H., Mass., R. I., Conn.
b N. Y., N. J., Del.
c Md., Va., N. C., S. C., Ga.
d Possible agreements represents the sum of opportunities all Pennsylvania delegates had to reach a 75% level of agreement with all delegates from a given section.
TABLE 1 (Continued)

INCIDENCE OF HIGH-LEVEL AGREEMENT (75% OR MORE) BETWEEN PENNSYLVANIA DELEGATES AND OTHER DELEGATES BY SECTIONS, 1778-1786

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pennsylvania Delegates</th>
<th>New England</th>
<th>Middle States</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pettit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>Bayard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pettit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Clair</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1785- | Ratio of Actual to Possible Agreements | 10% | 12% | 0% |
| 1786  |                                      |     |     |    |

large percentage of those agreements were with New Jersey delegates who belonged to the New England bloc (as did the Constitutionals themselves for the most part).

Even without these refinements it is clear that Constitutionals joined New England in opposition to the South.⁹ This is apparent not only in the commitments of Searle, Shippen and McLene, but also in the deviation of Morris from the 1778 delegation and in the low incidence of agreement between Atlee, Muhlenberg and the New Englanders. The transition from Constitutionalist to Republican delegations induced a corresponding realignment with the Southern bloc in Congress. This was particularly true during 1781, the initial year of Republican domination. At the same time, the Republican delegations tended to join more closely with the other Middle States—a tendency which became ascendent by 1783. During the years 1785 and 1786, on the other hand, there was in some respects a return to the New England orientation, a shift compatible with the Constitutionalist tinge of these delegations. It must be admitted, however, that because of changes in issues and personnel, and because of fewer roll calls and a higher

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⁹ Actually other refinements could be made, since all four of the agreements between the 1779 delegation and the South were with one individual, Richard Henry Lee, who was completely outside the Southern bloc. Lee voted down the line with the New Englanders in opposition to his Southern colleagues, and could actually be counted a New Englander for our purposes—indeed, he was condemned as such by his opponents in Virginia. If this were done, the alignment between Pennsylvania and New England would be even more impressive.
percentage of absenteeism, the results for those years are less con-
clusive than the returns of most previous years.\textsuperscript{10}

The variation in sectional orientation between Constitutionalist and Republican delegates can be brought into sharper focus by singling out those delegates who were most clearly identified with the two parties. This has been done in Table 2. The three Constitutionalists Searle, Shippen and McLene had as a group an average of 75\% agreement or more with almost half of all New England delegates, whereas they reached the 75\% level in only 13\% of the opportunities they had with other Middle State deleges. The 6\% alignment with the South represents 75\% agree-

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Delegates} & \textbf{New England} & \textbf{Middle States} & \textbf{Southern} \\
 & \textbf{Agreements} & \textbf{Agreements} & \textbf{Agreements} \\
\hline
\textbf{1779} & & & & & & \\
Searle & 13 & 3 & 23 & 10 & 2 & 20 & 18 & 1 & 6 \\
Shippen & 13 & 7 & 54 & 10 & 2 & 20 & 18 & 1 & 6 \\
McLene & 13 & 8 & 61 & 10 & 0 & 0 & 18 & 1 & 1 \\
\textbf{Totals} & 39 & 18 & 46 & 30 & 4 & 13 & 54 & 3 & 6 \\
\hline
\textbf{1781} & & & & & & \\
Clymer & 14 & 1 & 7 & 6 & 4 & 67 & 19 & 13 & 69 \\
Thomas Smith & 14 & 0 & 0 & 6 & 0 & 0 & 19 & 1 & 5 \\
\textbf{Totals} & 28 & 1 & 4 & 12 & 4 & 33 & 38 & 14 & 37 \\
\hline
\textbf{1783} & & & & & & \\
Fitzsimmons & 14 & 0 & 0 & 7 & 5 & 71 & 13 & 2 & 15 \\
John Montgomery & 14 & 0 & 0 & 7 & 3 & 43 & 13 & 4 & 31 \\
Peters & 14 & 0 & 0 & 7 & 3 & 43 & 13 & 3 & 23 \\
Wilson & 14 & 1 & 7 & 7 & 5 & 71 & 13 & 2 & 15 \\
\textbf{Totals} & 56 & 1 & 2 & 28 & 16 & 57 & 52 & 11 & 21 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{10}An analysis of the positions of 47 delegates on 226 votes was made for 1779, and 33 delegates on 70 votes for 1786. Although absenteeism was a real problem in Congress from the conclusion of peace through the end of the Confederation period, those delegates who were in attendance made a point of being present for roll calls in 1785 and 1786. This to some extent compensated for the lower number of delegates for the purposes of voting analysis.
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ment between all three and just one Southerner—Richard Henry Lee—a statistic which provides a final emphasis to the New England orientation, since Lee himself was a Southern deviant who was a core member of the New England bloc.

The abrupt shift toward the South in 1781 can be seen in the 4% alignment with New England as contrasted with the 37% alignment with the South. This was almost entirely due to the closer connection between Clymer and the Southern delegations, but the fact that the only 75% agreement Smith had was with a Southerner reveals a general drift of Republicans toward the South. The strongly Republican delegation of 1783 definitely inclined more toward the South than New England (21% as contrasted with 2%) and achieved the closest identification with its own section.

II

While the flux resulting from absenteeism and rapid turnover of personnel was particularly notable during the years following the Peace of Paris, it was hardly a novel occurrence. Only a few states enjoyed moderately stable representation in Congress even during the war years; and, as pointed out before, Pennsylvania had an unusually turbulent representation. Thus the reasons for the alliance between the Constitutionalist delegations of 1778-1780 and the New England bloc cannot be attributed to habits of cooperation between a long-standing combination of forces in Congress. Quite the contrary, the earliest contact between New England radicals and the resistance leadership in Pennsylvania before the first Continental Congress were for the most part with men who later became Republicans—individuals such as Thomas Mifflin, John Dickinson, Charles Thomson and George Clymer.11 On the

11 Thomson and Mifflin, along with Joseph Reed were singled out by Paul Revere, for example, when he carried the circular letter from Massachusetts containing the resolutions of the Boston town meeting after the Tea Party. Revere also carried private correspondence from Adams, Hancock and Cushing to Reed and Mifflin (William B. Reed, Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed [Philadelphia, 1847], I, 66). Adams corresponded with John Dickinson, whom he urged to get into print again in 1773 (Adams to Dickinson, March 27, 1773, William V. Wells, Samuel Adams [Boston, 1867], II, 59-60). Both Mifflin and Clymer visited Samuel Adams in Boston in 1773, and Mifflin was subsequently in correspondence with Adams about resistance policy (Mifflin to Adams, December 27, 1773, Samuel Adams Papers, New York Public Library; see also Kenneth Rossman, Thomas
other hand, once the New Englanders arrived in Philadelphia for
the first Congress they did meet some Pennsylvania radicals such
as George Bryan, Joseph Reed, James Cannon, Timothy Matlack,
William Shippen, and perhaps James Searle and others. We know
from Christopher Marshall's diary that Bryan, Fook, Cannon,
Matlack and Searle visited Marshall, as did the Adamses, Sher-
man, Ward and other New England delegates. Dr. Thomas Young,
the Boston radical and close acquaintance of the Adamses who
had previously moved to Philadelphia where he quickly became
a prominent supporter of independence and the Constitution of
1776, must also have contributed to the establishment of an early
rapport between the New England delegates and the Constitu-
tionalists. One Constitutionalist, Joseph Reed, had been in touch
with the Adamses as early as 1769, and had even had a role in
the origin of the Adams-Lee juncto.13

Thus while the Constitutionalists of 1778-1780 were not ac-
customed to working with New Englanders in Congress, they were
for the most part hardly strangers to each other. Indeed, in a few
instances there were familial ties between the Pennsylvania dele-
gation and members aligned with the New England bloc. Richard
Henry Lee, who voted more consistently with the New Englanders
than with his fellow Virginians at this stage of the war, was the
brother of Alice Lee Shippen, the wife of Dr. William Shippen,
Jr. John Adams mentions in his diary that Lee lived with the
Shippens during the months of the first

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Mifflin and the Politics of the American Revolution [Chapel Hill, 1952],
13-14, and George Clymer to Joseph Quincy, Jr., June 13, 1774, Peter
12 William Duane, ed., Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall,
1774-1781 (Albany, 1877), passim. Reed conveyed a letter from Dennis de
Berdt, the Massachusetts agent in London, to Samuel Adams, and later
apparently suggested to Adams that Arthur Lee, whom Reed had known
in London, would be a good replacement for de Berdt when the latter died.
This contributed to the beginning of a regular correspondence between
Adams and the Lees, the fruits of which matured in the Adams-Lee
alliance in the Continental Congress. See Samuel Adams to Dennis de Berdt,
November 6, 1769, and Arthur Lee to Joseph Reed, January 18, 1771. Both
letters are in Reed, Reed, I, 41 n., 43.
and the Constitutionalists had been complete strangers they would have tended to form a voting bloc. Most New Englanders and most Constitutionalists shared a programmatic outlook: both groups were inclined to extoll the militia and oppose the move to give officers in the Continental army half pay for life; both supported price controls and criticized merchants such as Robert Morris who were profiting from the war; both groups were discernibly anti-Gallican when it became apparent that Gérard and Holker were cooperating mainly with Robert Morris, Gouverneur Morris and other leaders of the New England opposition in Congress; and in varying degrees both groups distrusted consolidated political authority, while at the same time inclining toward stern measures in treating monopolizers, profiteers and all who were suspected of lacking commitment to the Revolutionary cause.

To the degree that the Constitutionalists may have been the product of a democratic thrust in the early years of the Revolution, and to the degree that the New Englanders were accustomed to more egalitarian political and social practices and traditions than the Southern gentry whose delegates formed the nucleus of the opposition to the New England bloc in Congress during this period, the New England-Pennsylvania alliance represented a democratic challenge of the old pre-Revolutionary elite. It seems unlikely, however, that this alliance can be attributed to a class conflict between democrats and aristocrats. Timothy Matlack and Samuel Adams might be called democrats, but Roger Sherman, William Shippen and Richard Henry Lee hardly fill the bill. Further, while the New Englanders were often accused of being levellers, they did not legislate as levellers in Congress, nor did they attempt to achieve reforms within their own states comparable with the alterations of the pre-Revolutionary establishment embodied in the Pennsylvania constitution. It is more probable that these groups were united by a common perception of their role as guarantors of the republican purity of the Revolution. It was this assumption that subsumed issues such as half-pay for officers and the struggle between the "virtuous" Arthur Lee and the

corrupt Silas Deane supported by his “interested” cohorts in America.\textsuperscript{15}

The political amalgam implicit in the pursuit of Revolutionary virtue can be seen in the Holker affair of the summer of 1779—an episode somewhat less known than the Lee-Deane affair, yet an exquisite counterpoint of the politics of morality on local, Congressional, and even international levels. The move against Holker really began as an attack upon Robert Morris launched by a Philadelphia price fixing committee led by Constitutionalists such as Daniel Roberdeau and William Henry who were convinced that Morris had been profiteering in flour on public as well as private account. The committee, under the chairmanship of Henry, had seized a quantity of flour purchased in Delaware by one Jonathan Rumford under consignment by Morris at a price which the committee considered unreasonably high. Since Morris was acting as agent for John Holker who was buying the flour for d’Estaing’s squadron, the dispute quickly became an international incident. The complaints of Holker and the French Minister Gérard to the Pennsylvania Council and Congress were endorsed by the Republicans in Pennsylvania and by the adherents of Morris in Congress, while the committee was tacitly supported by President Reed, the Constitutionalists, and the Adams-Lee faction in Congress. Reed indeed believed that the controversies between the committee and its opponents were manifestations of the battle between Lee and Deane which had split Congress down the middle. He may well have been right, for on a roll call vote dealing with the Holker matter, the division in Congress was with one or two exceptions identical with the lineup of forces on the Lee-Deane imbroglio.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}A casual inspection of the many letters dealing with the Lee-Deane dispute from members of the Adams-Lee-Constitutionalist group in Edmund C. Burnett, ed., Letters of Members of the Continental Congress (Washington, D. C., 1924-36), IV, \textit{passim}, will demonstrate the pervasiveness of Samuel Adams’ conviction that “a Monopoly of Trade, and not the Liberty of their Country is the sole Object of some Mens Views” (Adams to Samuel Cooper, January 19, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 37). See also Brunhouse, \textit{Counter-Revolution}, ch. 3; Thomas P. Abernethy, “Commercial Activities of Silas Deane in France,” American Historical Review, XXXIX (April, 1939), 477-485; H. J. Henderson, “Political Factions in the Continental Congress, 1774-1783” (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1963), ch. 8.

\textsuperscript{16}Most of the correspondence relating to the Holker affair can be found in the Papers of the Continental Congress, Item 96, National Archives. Reed did caution the committee not to publish its accusations before the
Just as the New England bloc supported the Constitutionalists in battles against Morris and the financial community surrounding him, the Constitutionalists backed the New Englanders in their efforts to include American rights to the Newfoundland fisheries as a *sine qua non* of peace in the debates over the formulation of American war aims. Again, when Congress appointed a peace commissioner, the New England candidate John Adams received the solid support of the Constitutionalist delegate. This was in part simply a Constitutionalist endoral of New England’s vital interests, but doubtless both groups were inspired also by nationalist-expansionist anti-Gallican sentiments. In this respect the Pennsylvania-New England coalition was more nationalist (i.e., pro-American, anti-Gallican, anti-Spanish) than the centralists we customarily characterize as nationalists. The coalition defended the fishery rights as an indispensable support for an American merchant marine, and in somewhat the same manner generally voted in favor of American rights to the navigation of the Mississippi, the western imperial corollary of the fishery rights. The delivery of support for the Mississippi claims occurred in 1779, a time when even many Southerners did not feel secure enough to make the claim.

The Lee-Deane quarrel subsided by the end of 1779, and both Samuel Adams and Richard Henry Lee left Congress in early summer of that year. By July, James Searle lamented to Lee that “We feel our loss in you the more as we are also deprived of that great Statesman and honest man Mr. Adams who has left us struggling with a set of men some of whom on my conscience I believe mean not the good of America.” It was not long before Searle himself left Congress to Journey to Europe in search of

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dispute had been impartially considered by the Council and the Congress (Reed to William Henry, July 23, 1779, *ibid.*), but later excused the actions of the committee as “the effusions of honest but intemperate zeal” (Read, *Remarks on a Late Publication in the Independent Gazetteer . . .* [Philadelphia, 1783], 41). Gérard was quoted by Meriwether Smith of Virginia as believing that the committees were “instruments in the Hands of designing Men, who are not friends to the Alliance, and wish to throw all Government into the People by those Means, the better to enable them to attain their favorite purpose” (Smith to Thomas Jefferson, July 30, 1779, *Burnett, Letters, IV, 348*). For voting on the Holker matter see the roll call of August 5, 1779, dealing with the resolution offered by Gouverneur Morris to publish Gérard’s memorial to Congress dealing with the Holker dispute in W. C. Ford et al., eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington, 1924-36), XIV, 923.
a loan for Pennsylvania. (In Europe he experienced only frustration, and significantly ascribed his failure in part to the influence of the nationalist Franklin whom he chastised as an enemy of private state loans.) Searle left a delegation which in 1780 was shifting from close attachment to Massachusetts and the Adams-Lee faction to a fringe connection with the New England bloc—a position which anticipated Constitutionalist alignments of the later 1780's. In similar fashion Searle's mission designed to buttress a parochial fiscal program also anticipated later Constitutionalist policy.  

By 1781 the Pennsylvania delegation was filled with Republicans, and the orientation of the state shifted perceptively toward an alliance with the Southern delegations in Congress. Indeed, Atlee and Clymer, as Table 1 might suggest, voted closely enough with the members from Maryland, the Carolinas and Georgia to qualify as members of the Southern voting bloc in 1781. The sharpness of this break with New England—so sudden and complete that it was without parallel in the voting records—would suggest the existence of a rather well-developed two party system in Pennsylvania even if we knew nothing at all about the struggles between Constitutionalists and Republicans. This quantitative evidence alone would suggest that the delegation of 1781 was fulfilling a factional purpose in breaking away from the New Englanders (assuming of course that the sectional structure of Congressional factionalism remained relatively constant—as indeed it did). Thus the simplest and in some ways the most interesting explanation of the shift of the Pennsylvania delegation is functional rather than substantive in nature.

It is not difficult, on the other hand, to add doctrinal content to this structural explanation. On the key issues of foreign affairs and military policy the Southerners and the Republicans saw eye to eye. Rather than backing New England's demand for fishery rights—a demand which had been opposed by France both as an impediment to allied diplomacy and (more covertly) as an intrusion upon her own interests in the fisheries—the Republican delegates assumed a stance more in line with French suggestions.

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and Southern inclinations. To the indignation of the few remaining members of the old New England bloc, the Congress, with Southern and some Pennsylvanian support, advised its emissaries abroad to “ultimately govern yourself” by the “advice and opinion” of the French court.\(^\text{18}\) It is clear that both the Republicans and the Southerners were attempting to cement the French alliance, the Southerners because British military pressures in Georgia and the Carolinas seemed to make French aid a critical necessity, and the Republicans partly because of the same conviction which was surely not impaired by the harmony of interests and intentions between Holker and Luzerne and the Republican mercantile groups in Philadelphia. Robert Morris had handled some purchasing for the French through Holker, and the two had undertaken private business ventures as well, while Luzerne was an associate of Morris, Wilson and others in land speculations.\(^\text{19}\)

On matters of finance such as the voting on the proposed five percent impost, the form of state contributions to the Confederation, and the creation of a department of finance, the Republicans and the Southerners also joined forces in a program of consolidated fiscal administration. The Republicans were more tolerant of centralized authority than were the Constitutionalists, so it was entirely appropriate for them to support such an establishment, but it is quite remarkable that the Southern members of Congress not only supported the creation of the superintendency of finance and Robert Morris for the post, but even advanced the crucial resolutions for the innovation. It was Thomas Burke of North Carolina who moved that Morris be allowed to take over the superintendency on his own terms—a striking event in view

\(^\text{18}\) *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XX, 627. On the vote to accept the new instructions to the American minister Clymer and Atlee voted in favor, while Joseph Montgomery and Thomas Smith voted in opposition. Clymer’s vote is consistent with his Republicanism and Atlee’s with his anti-Constitutionalist stand in the 1779 delegation, while Montgomery’s description is compatible in a sense with the fact that he must have received Constitutionalist support in the election of 1780. Only Thomas Smith’s vote seems incongruous. In the full analysis of voting of foreign policy issues during 1781, however, the question between bloc configurations in Congress and Pennsylvania party alignments is quite consistent. Clymer and Atlee supported the French position almost uniformly, Smith nearly as often, and Montgomery least often.

\(^\text{19}\) The contacts between Morris and Holker can be traced in the Robert Morris Papers, Library of Congress, as well as in the Holker materials in the Library of Congress, the National Archives and in the Holker Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan.
of the strong state rights commitment Burke had always held. It is at least plausible that such close cooperation was partly the result of the sharp veer away from New England policy managed by the Republicans.

At the same time it should be noted that a large percentage of the Southern support for the nationalist program came from the Georgia and Carolina delegations. The voting bloc which
emerged from the Republican-Southern coalition included Atlee and Clymer of Pennsylvania, Houston of New Jersey, Carroll and Jenifer of Maryland, Sharpe of North Carolina, Mathews and Motte of South Carolina, and Howly, Few and Walton of Georgia. Duane of New York, Montgomery of Pennsylvania, Burke of North Carolina, and Everleigh of South Carolina might be termed peripheral members, but neither the core nor the fringe of the bloc included any Virginians despite the fact that Jones and Madison were present in 1781 and were in many respects energetic nationalists. This distribution of support suggests that the Republican-Southern coalition of 1781 was also partly a marriage of convenience generated in a time of exigence and crisis when the deeper South felt constrained to support a nationalist program from fear of being severed from the rest of the Confederation in a peace settlement formulated on the basis of uti possidetis.

By 1783 the situation was much different. With peace, the ties between the Middle States and the deep South were considerably weakened; the Southern coalition tended to fragment and the Middle States to draw together as a result of changes in circumstance and personnel. The Pennsylvania and New York delegations formed the solid nucleus of a bloc reflecting the nationalist sentiment of the Republicans, Alexander Hamilton (an influential member of the New York contingent in the bloc), Robert Morris (still superintendent of finance), and the nationalist Virginians James Madison and Joseph Jones. This bloc was a more perfect expression of Pennsylvania Republicanism than the coalition of 1781 had been. With a core composed of delegates from the large commercial Middle States and with support from convinced Southern centralists rather than alarmed state rightists, the 1783 alliance could pursue the national program which had been a fixed policy for years with men such as Robert and Gouverneur Morris, James Wilson, and James Duane: ratification of the five percent impost, commutation of officers' pay, continental funding of the public debt, the allocation of coercive authority to the Continental Congress and other corollary objectives.

It can hardly be doubted that Pennsylvanians both within and

\[\text{Footnote: For a schematic of bloc alignments in 1781 see Henderson, "Political Factions," 283.}\]
without Congress were at this time exerting a pronounced influence in national policy, and in this sense too the Republican tendency reached its culmination in 1783. The Pennsylvania delegates—particularly Peters and Wilson—were more active in debate and promoting resolutions than previous Pennsylvania delegates had been, and of course the extremely influential role of Robert Morris and his subordinates in the department of finance supplied additional emphasis to the Republican thrust in national politics. One member of Congress (probably Arthur Lee) complained about a “phalanx” composed of Morris and other wealthy Philadelphia merchants in association with Luzerne “that attacks with great force, and when their whole efforts are brought to a point, and their numerous dependents are brought forth to action, they are almost irresistible.” According to this writer, Congress would have to “remove to some spot where they will have a better chance to act independently.” Thus the very focus of centralist energies which made the bloc effective also excited a parochialist opposition in a neo-Adams-Lee faction composed of delegates such as Stephen Higginson and Samuel Osgood of Massachusetts, Howell of Rhode Island, Arthur Lee and Theodorick Bland of Virginia. After the revolt of the Pennsylvania Line did prompt Congress to leave Philadelphia, Samuel Osgood contended that “It would not have been possible that Congress should ever have been a free and independent body in the city of P-a. Plans for absolute government, for deceiving the lower classes of people, for introducing undue influence, for any kind of government, in which democracy has the least possible share, originate, are cherished and disseminated from thence.”

The nationalist ascendency was relatively short-lived. By 1784 the Constitutionalists again won control of the Pennsylvania assembly and proceeded to undermine the Republican state program. The conservative nationally-oriented fiscal system engineered by Robert Morris was countered with the promulgation of a plan largely formulated by Charles Pettit which among other things provided for the issuance of paper money and state assumption of interest on Congressional loan office certificates. The Constitutionalists also secured the revocation of the charter of the Bank

24 A Member of Congress to .................. [1783], Burnett, Letters, VII, 156 (Burnett thinks the handwriting is Arthur Lee’s); Samuel Osgood to John Adams, December 7, 1783, ibid., 378.
of North America, thereby, completing the assault upon the nationalist financial structure. In Congress the nationalists were defeated with the failure of the impost, the termination of the superintendency of finance, and its replacement by a treasury board dominated by parochialists including Arthur Lee, now superbly positioned to guard against nationalist "deceptions." The Constitutionalists triumphed in the election of delegates to the Congress in 1784, so it would seem that the stage was set for a return to the partisan alignments of 1778 and 1779.

The partisan structure of 1785 and 1786 was in many ways essentially the same as during earlier years, the basic division being between New England and the South, while the Middle States formed a complex pivot. The issues and personnel during these late years of the Confederation were, however, quite different from both the period of New England dominance and the period of nationalist ascendancy. Virtually no members of the nationalist bloc of 1783 were present, and although Richard Henry Lee and Howell of Rhode Island continued to represent the core and Gerry and Holten the fringe of the old Adams-Lee connection in 1785, none of these delegates was present in 1786. One important effect of the change in personnel was to diminish the intensity of the centralist-state rights struggle of the early 1780's. This is not to say that the struggle no longer existed—rather it had become transplanted outside Congress. There is every reason to believe that even delegates who would later become dedicated Federalists were willing to work within the bounds of the Articles of Confederation. When, for example, the Massachusetts legislature suggested to its delegation that a convention for the wholesale modification of the Articles would be desirable, the Massachusetts delegates, including Rufus King, advised strongly against broad amendments on the ground that centralist innovations threatened subversion of the republican Revolutionary settlement.

12 Brunhouse, Counter-Revolution, 169-175.
13 See Massachusetts Delegates to Governor James Bowdoin, New York, September 3, 1785, Burnett, Letters, VIII, 206-210, especially 208-209. The letter is signed by Gerry, Holten and King, and includes the statement that "The great object of the Revolution, was the Establishment of good Government, and each of the States, in forming their own, as well as the federal Constitution, have adopted republican principles. Notwithstanding this, plans have been artfully laid, and vigorously pursued, which had they been successful, We think would inevitably have changed our republican
With the departure of the old partisans and the subsidence of the psychology of crisis which had characterized the war years, a fragmentation of national politics ensued. This meant that the major issues of the period—finance, foreign policy and western lands—would be managed not so much as devices for larger ideological purposes of the politics of morality or the politics of centralism, but rather in the more immediate and pragmatic terms of state and sectional self-interest. Of course, this did not bring an end to critical political controversy. Indeed, James Monroe was convinced that the Massachusetts delegation was heading up a cabal which aimed at dismemberment of the union, and that Pettit and Bayard might be in favor of joining such an eastern confederacy. It is not inconceivable that the Massachusetts delegates, very much frustrated over the sharp decline of New England trade and the apparent impossibility of promulgating navigation legislation to exclude foreign ships from the American carrying trade in the face of Southern opposition, were indeed talking secession. Certainly Rufus King toyed with the idea, or something resembling it.

Monroe's reports to Virginia, however, were probably exaggerated. His perception of the alliance between the Massachusetts delegation and the Pennsylvanians seems imperfect in the light of the voting record, for despite the fact that Pettit and Bayard agreed with King and other New Englanders that public creditors in their respective states should be protected, and that Atlantic commerce and the fisheries should be fostered before the navigation of the Mississippi and the settlement of western lands should be promoted, the overall voting pattern clearly indicates that Bayard and Pettit did not align closely with the New England bloc. Actually the Republican St. Clair stood closer to New Governments, into baleful Aristocracies. Those plans are frustrated, but the same Spirit remains in their abettors. . . . What the Effect then may be of calling a Convention to revise the Confederation generally, We leave with your Excellency and the honorable Legislature to determine.”

23 Monroe to Governor Patrick Henry, August 12, 1786, ibid., 425.
24 King to John Adams, November 2, 1785, Charles King, ed., Life and Correspondence of Rufus King (New York, 1894), I, 113. Benjamin Lincoln wrote to King, February 11, 1786, that the union would be much firmer if it were to extend from east to west rather than north to south (ibid., 158-159).
England than did the two Constitutionalists, something Monroe was apparently unaware of. Nor did Monroe understand, because he was a recent arrival in Congress, the difference between the Pennsylvania-New England alliance of 1779 and the cabal he discerned in 1785-1786. In 1779 the two blocs were bound together in the enactment of a Revolutionary role which made their alliance rise above the simple calculus of state and individual interest, despite the fact that some degree of self-interest was always present. The alliance rationalized its opposition to the Middle State-Southern nationalists as a defense of American rights against French machinations (as in the fisheries debate), or as a defense of the republican integrity of the Revolution against what were presumed to be corrupt centralizing tendencies of the Morris influence. This sort of ideological commitment was subordinated to other interests in 1786. Pettit opposed the Morris brand of nationalism, but largely because of his being a business competitor in the Philadelphia business community, not so much because of any scruples he might have had about the incompatibility of profits and Revolutionary purity. Indeed, when the Adams-Lee partisans were combatting the degenerative tendencies of merchants in 1778, Pettit was accepting a commission as deputy to Nathanael Greene, Quartermaster General. Pettit’s strongest contacts in New England were not with politicians such as Sam Adams and James Lovell, but with merchants such as Greene and Jeremiah Wadsworth. Likewise, Bayard opposed Morris and the Bank of North America not from doctrinaire opposition to moneyed influence in politics but as a “discontented moneyed man” who supported the creation of a rival bank.27

The Constitutionalists of 1785 and 1786 did not measure up to the criterion of republican disinterest so emphasized during the war, but in a sense this was a moot point in view of the composition of the New England delegation. By 1786 there were no New England connections with the earlier alliance any more than there were Constitutionalist connections. Even in 1785 the linkage was tenuous, for while both Gerry and Holten of the Massachusetts delegation of 1785 had served in 1779, neither had been

For an explanation of the sectional interests in servicing the public debt, see E. James Ferguson, The Power of the Purse (Chapel Hill, 1961), ch. 10, especially 212-213.

27 Brunhouse, Counter-Revolution, 150.
core members of the Adams-Lee faction which was the nucleus of the New England dominated alliance. Further, Gerry and Holten also seem to have fallen short of disinterested public service; Gerry (like Pettit) was accumulating large quantities of public securities and Holten seems to have done some business through John Swanwick, a close associate of Robert Morris. Holten had also turned apostate on the issue of commutation of officers' pay. Rufus King, who joined Gerry and Holten in 1785 and remained on after they left in 1786, certainly did not function like an Adams-Lee partisan. In 1785 King agreed with Richard Henry Lee on only 32% of the votes they cast in common, while Gerry and Lee were in agreement 56% of the time (roughly the same ratio between the two as 1779).

King’s index of agreement with Lee was unusually low, but there were no New England delegates in 1785 who even approximated the 84% level between Lee and Sam Adams or the 83% level between Lee and Whipple in 1779. This estrangement between Lee and the New Englanders was symptomatic of yet a third reason for the absence of an Adams-Lee style coalition in 1785 and 1786. While in 1779 the coalition could subsume particular issues within a larger ideological frame of pro-American (anti-Gallican), anti-commercial (anti-Morris) particularism, this had become virtually impossible in 1785 and 1786. The decline of New England shipping as a result of British penetration of the post-war trade made it indispensable that counter-measures be taken. When King and Root and other New Englanders sought to serve this vital concern by advocating a Congressional power to expel foreign ships they had to contend with the opposition of Richard Henry Lee who expostulated on the avarice of commercial interest and the dangers of central authority (precisely the argument of the Adams-Lee group in 1779). The Jay-Gardoqui negotiations made a Southern connection, such as that which existed between the New England-Pennsylvania alliance and both Lee and Laurens in 1779, nearly impossible. In 1779 the Adams-Lee faction had been able to press for both the fisheries and the navigation of the Mississippi against both France

88 Holten seems to have believed he was dropped from the Massachusetts delegation in the election of 1783 partly because he favored commutation of officers’ pay (Holten to Mr. [Aaron?] Wood, July 31, 1783, Samuel Holten Papers, Library of Congress).
and Spain, but in 1786 all the Northerners had to play Spain’s diplomatic game in order to secure a commercial interest at the expense of larger national aims in the West. The most that could be stitched from all of these materials was a thoroughly Northern and moderately compatible quilt of state self-interests.

III

After 1776 no state delegation shifted its orientation within the bloc structure of Congress to the degree and with the frequency that Pennsylvania did. There can be no question that such shifts were in large measure due to the fact that Pennsylvania had a more rationalized two party system than obtained in any other state during the Confederation era. Further research into the relationship between local and Congressional factionalism in other states would in all likelihood uncover reflections if not duplications of the Pennsylvania pattern, particularly in the Middle States and Virginia. Such research would doubtless lead one to the conclusion that national politics even during the Confederation period can be understood completely only in the context of local as well as national political controversy.

At the same time it needs to be stressed that the Congressional attachments of the various Pennsylvania delegations indicate that strong and cohesive alignments within the national focus emerged not simply as the result of the displacement of one local party by another, but also—indeed most readily—in response to issues which could be comprehended in ideological terms within that national focus. With the exception of the one issue of the Jay-Gardoqui negotiations, the partisanship of the war years was not duplicated in the post-war period of the Confederation nor, one suspects, did a comparable level of partisan commitment occur again on the legislative level until the highly charged debate over the Jay Treaty.

In certain respects it would be unlikely that all states could have played the role that Pennsylvania did, even if local party development were as well advanced as in Pennsylvania. Since the essential structure of national partisan politics was one of North-South sectional opposition, the pivotal position of Pennsylvania was, if not unique, at least quite different from the station of the
New England and Southern states. The only examples of coalitions between those two sections were the Lee-Laurens connection with the New England bloc in 1779, and a link between Howell of Rhode Island and Theodorick Bland, Arthur Lee and John Gervais in 1783. It is improbable that even sharp state level partisanship would have overcome the substantial economic and cultural disparities between New England and the South to produce workable intersectional alliances during this initial period of national development. Surely the Pennsylvania delegates perceived their position and the opportunity it gave them to throw substantial weight in Congress. With the 1779 Constitutionalists this perception was expressed in partisan commitment in support of the New England bloc; with the 1783 Republicans it was manifested in the creation of a “third force.” By the late 1780's both Constitutionalists and Republicans seem to have used this position in concert for at least a while in order to service the calculations of parochial interest. With the passage of the Federal Constitution, Pennsylvania legislators would make even more effective use of their position as a swing state.