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U.S. History and Government ~ Miss Cummings Constitutional Foundations

**HOW WERE THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION A SUCCESS OR FAILURE?**

Directions: Read the following and then answer the questions that appear below:

**TAXATION & COMMERCE**

Under the Articles of Confederation, the central government’s power was kept quite limited. The Confederation Congress could make decisions, but lacked enforcement powers. Implementation of most decisions, including modifications to the Articles, required unanimous approval of all thirteen state legislatures. Congress was denied any powers of taxation: it could only request money from the states. The states often failed to meet these requests in full, leaving both Congress and the Continental Army chronically short of money. As more money was printed by Congress, the continental dollars depreciated. Congress had also been denied the power to regulate either foreign trade or interstate commerce and, as a result, all of the States maintained control over their own trade policies. The states and the Confederation Congress both incurred large debts during the Revolutionary War, and how to repay those debts became a major issue of debate following the War. Some States paid off their war debts and others did not. Federal assumption of the states’ war debts became a major issue in the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention.

**ARMY DISCONTENT**

The peace treaty left the United States independent and at peace but with an unsettled governmental structure. The Articles envisioned a permanent confederation, but granted to the Congress – the only federal institution – little power to finance itself or to ensure that its resolutions were enforced. The Continental Congress printed paper money which was so depreciated that it ceased to pass as currency, spawning the expression “not worth a continental”. Congress could not levy taxes and could only make requisitions upon the States. Less than a million and a half dollars came into the treasury between 1781 and 1784, although the governors had been asked for two million in 1783 alone. On a 90-degree June day in 1783, former Revolutionary War soldiers, carrying muskets, marched on the Philadelphia statehouse where Congress was meeting. They threatened to hold the members hostage until they were paid back wages. When Congress asked Pennsylvania to send a detachment of militia to protect them, the state refused, and the humiliated Congress temporarily relocated, first in Princeton, N.J., and later in Annapolis, Md., and New York City.

**SOVEREIGN STATES**

The original 13 States were divided by their differences more than they were united by their common concerns. Small States feared the big States, which sought dominance within the union. The commercial north and the agricultural south had strongly different interests. As growing numbers of farmers faced the possibility of losing their homes and land, they urged their state governments to issue new paper currency with which the farmers could pay their debts. The devalued currency would obviously be meaningless to creditors who strongly opposed such measures. In Rhode Island, the state government gave into the demands of the farmers after the Commerce Party defeated the Country Party in statewide elections. Paper money was printed and creditors, not debtors, were threatened with imprisonment. Its delegates blocked nationalist measures – including a 5 percent duty on imports – in the Confederation Congress and its legislature made it a criminal offense for merchants to refuse to accept the state’s nearly worthless currency. State judges who struck down the law were removed from office. Thereafter, residents of other states often referred to Rhode Island as “Rogue Island.”

**SHAY’S REBELLION**

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| At meeting of the delegates from fifty towns in the county of Hampshire (Massachusetts)…the convention, after serious consideration and discussion, believes the people are unhappy because they have serious grievances and unnecessary burdens placed upon them. Some of the grievances are listed below:1. The Senate is restricted to large property owners
2. The salaries of the government officials are not controlled by the people’s representatives
3. Civil officers, such as Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs and constables are not annually elected
4. The present system of taxation is unfair because the majority of the people are unfairly taxed
 |  | A committee of rebels issues a statement of causes to the people of the several towns in the county of Hampshire…Gentlemen: We think it only right to tell you why there have been uprisings among the people.1. The present way of collecting debts is filling our jails with debtors because there is a great shortage of cash
2. The writ of Habeas Corpus has been suspended for those people who have been active in asserting and maintaining the rights of the people.
3. The Riot Act gives Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs and constables unlimited power.

We demand a quick solution to the problem of our foreign and domestic debt. |

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| **HOW WERE THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION A SUCCESS OR FAILURE?** |
| Identify the term: Shays’ Rebellion |  |
| How did each of these situations undermine the success of the Articles of Confederation? | Political: | Economic: | Social: |
| Which of these situations would you consider the most important? Why? |  |
| How would a more powerful national government help strengthen the nation? Give an example and explain your answer. |  |  |  |