

A New Government

Just as Shay's rebellion was trying to force the government to take action to help the poor farmers of America there was another group being established to consider an alternate vision for the future of America. This group was mainly concerned with economic policy and how the states competing with each other was counter-productive. In response the Virginia legislature called for a meeting in Annapolis, MA in 1786 to discuss economic matters. 12 delegates from five states were present but they decided to meet again in a year in Philadelphia. Shays' Rebellion convinced them for the need to respond to different problems in the 'Critical period of the 1780s. In January 1787, the congress directed a meeting to revise the Articles of Confederation which was ultimately too weak to rule the country.

The Philadelphia Convention saw fifty-five delegates from twelve states arrive. Rhode Island was the only one who refused to send a delegate to a convention to strengthen the power of the government. Most who were chosen to attend had experience on a national level. This included Revolutionary leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Robert Morris. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were not presents as they were in France and England securing relations. Also not present were people from the western parts of the country as well as artisans or tenant farmers. All of those in attendance were wealthy national leaders who did not reflect the full spectrum of American society. Also, because they had served as national representatives before, they all were committed to a strong central government. They felt the Articles of Confederation gave too much power to the states. The convention wanted to create a National government that could deal with major problems from diplomacy to trade to economics to internal issues.

Even though most of the delegates had a common interest at the Philadelphia Convention they still could not decide how to revise the Articles of Confederation and build a stronger government. They began by solving procedural issues on how to move forward and how the convention would operate. George Washington was elected as the presiding officer. They decided on the voting procedure in which each state would get one vote. The most influential of the delegates, James Madison, proposed the Virginia plan. This called for a strong central government with three elements. It first placed national law above state sovereignty. Second, it stated the people could vote directly for their national leaders and representatives. Third, he proposed the government have three branches: A legislature with two chambers, and executive and judiciary branch. The lower house or chamber of legislature would be elected by the people who would then elect the upper house. Then both houses would choose and executive and judiciary.

Madison's plan was very different and creative. Even though it established a strong central government which most supported it was rejected at the Convention. The opposition came from delegates who represented states with smaller populations. If the plan succeeded the small states would lose their influence in government because if they were represented based on population they would always lose. They countered with another proposal called the New Jersey Plan. This plan was a version of how Congress already worked under the Articles. It called for a unicameral or one house legislature with one vote per state. After many debates and a very close vote, the Virginia Plan was finally accepted with the

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stipulation there would be further discussion. This was a major turning point. They decided to create a new constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation.

