**Chapter 3 – The Constitution and Federalism**

**7 Why Didn’t the First U.S. Government Work?**

After winning independence from Britain, the newly formed United States needed a national government. The first attempt was the **Articles of Confederation**, adopted in 1781. The Articles created a loose alliance of 13 independent states, each with its own power. The national government had no president, no court system, and very limited powers. Congress could make laws but had no way to enforce them.

The goal was to avoid tyranny by keeping the central government weak. But this led to serious problems: Congress couldn’t raise taxes, regulate trade, or establish courts. Each state had one vote, no matter its size, and the Articles required a unanimous vote to be amended. Disagreements and economic troubles led many leaders to believe a stronger national government was needed.

In 1787, delegates from the states met at the **Constitutional Convention** in Philadelphia. Though originally tasked with fixing the Articles, they ended up writing an entirely new Constitution, one that created a stronger federal government, while still protecting states’ rights and individual freedoms.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **Articles of Confederation** | The first constitution of the U.S., creating a weak national government and strong states. |
| **Confederation** | A union of independent states with a weak central authority. |
| **Shays’ Rebellion** | A 1786 uprising by farmers revealed the weakness of the Articles and helped lead to the Constitutional Convention. |
| **Constitutional Convention** | A 1787 meeting in Philadelphia where delegates wrote the U.S. Constitution. |
| **Federal System** | A government where power is divided between national and state governments. |

**Active Learning Exercise: Run the Country, Articles Edition**

**Orienting Question:**

*Why were the Articles of Confederation so bad?*

**Objective:**

Students will simulate the U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation to experience its limitations firsthand.

**Instructions:**

1. **Set Up the Simulation (20–25 minutes):**
   * Divide the class into 5–6 “states.” Each group gets:
     + A state name
     + A resource (like crops, money, or goods)
     + A small list of local laws or goals
   * One group acts as the **Continental Congress**, with no power to tax or enforce decisions, only to suggest cooperation.
2. **Scenario:**
   * The states must respond to national problems: war debt, trade disputes, building infrastructure, defense, etc.
   * Congress proposes a tax to pay for national defense. Will states agree?
   * A rebellion breaks out in one state. Will others send help?
   * One state begins taxing imports from another. Can Congress stop it?
3. **Discussion:**
   * What problems arose from having a weak central government?
   * How did state interests conflict with national needs?
   * Why might leaders have decided to write a new Constitution?

**Review Questions**

1. What were the major weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?
2. Why did the Framers intentionally create a weak central government at first?
3. How did events like Shays’ Rebellion reveal the need for change?
4. What was the original purpose of the Constitutional Convention?
5. How did the Constitution address the problems of the Articles?

**States:**

**State A: New Hampshire**

* **Key Interests:** Small population, fishing economy, rural communities
* **Position on National Issues:** Wants local control; hesitant to fund national army or debt
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Views Congress as distant and mostly irrelevant

**🔷 State B: Virginia**

* **Key Interests:** Large population, agriculture-based economy (especially tobacco), slave labor
* **Position on National Issues:** Wants more say due to population size; opposes equal votes per state
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Frustrated by lack of enforcement power and poor organization

**🔷 State C: New York**

* **Key Interests:** Commerce and trade, heavily populated port cities
* **Position on National Issues:** Supports trade regulation to reduce interstate tariffs and competition
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Wants stronger federal control over economic matters

**🔷 State D: South Carolina**

* **Key Interests:** Plantation economy, slavery, exporting crops
* **Position on National Issues:** Opposes taxes on exports; wants state control of slavery policies
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Suspicious of northern interference in state matters

**🔷 State E: Massachusetts**

* **Key Interests:** Shipping and trade, urbanized population, debt from Revolutionary War
* **Position on National Issues:** Urges stronger central government to collect taxes and handle uprisings (like Shays’ Rebellion)
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Disappointed in its inability to maintain order

**🔷 State F: Pennsylvania**

* **Key Interests:** Quaker influence, large middle-class population, manufacturing
* **Position on National Issues:** Supports stronger national government, especially for economic planning and defense
* **Attitude Toward Congress:** Believes it needs enforcement power and financial stability