

14.2 The First American Government: The Articles of Confederation

After declaring their independence, the 13 American states (the former colonies) created a government to fight the war against Britain and to solve common problems. They described this government in a document called the *Articles of Confederation*.

The government created by the Articles was very weak. It had a Congress that could make war and pass other laws. But making laws was difficult, because every law had to be approved by 9 of the 13 states. In addition, the government did not have a president, and it did not have a court that could settle disagreements between states.

The Confederation Congress succeeded in directing the Revolutionary War. But once the war was over, Congress had a difficult time solving the new country's problems. For one thing, it had no power to collect taxes or to force the states to give it money. It could not even pay the soldiers who had fought in the Continental Army.

Imagine losing your home because you can't pay your bills. That is what happened to many former soldiers and poor farmers. Some of them were even put in jail. One farmer

complained, "The great [rich] men are going to get all we have, and I think it is time for us to rise and put a stop to it."

In Massachusetts, a former soldier named Daniel Shays tried to do just that. Shays and hundreds of other men took up their guns and tried to stop the courts from taking people's property. Their fight against the government became known as *Shays's Rebellion*.

Shays's Rebellion frightened many leaders. More and more, they wanted a strong government that could pay the nation's bills, settle arguments between states, and maintain order.

A farmer attacks a government official as others cheer him in this scene from Shays's Rebellion. Shays's Rebellion frightened many leaders. They saw the rebellion as a sign that the Articles of Confederation were not working.

